

Socialist Worker

For a socialist alternative to Labour

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inside

Liz Davies, former NEC member, on 'Why I have left New Labour'

pages 8 & 9



New Labour spent less than Tories

NO WONDER THINGS HAVE NOT GOT BETTER

"DON'T GO back" to the terrible Tory years will be the theme of New Labour's election campaign.

Those years were certainly terrible—schools and hospitals were starved of cash, pensioners died from the cold, public services were privatised and the rich got richer.

And after four years of New Labour?

Shaming figures just released by the Treasury and the Office for National Statistics show New Labour has spent less on improving vital services in every year Tony Blair has been in 10 Downing Street than the Tories did in their last 12 months in office.

Public investment, mostly in schools and hospitals, was £4.7 billion in the Tories' last year.

Last financial year Labour spent £3.5 billion, and this year it is set to spend even less. The figures expose a wider trend.

●Total spending on health was 5.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in the Tories' last year. Under New Labour it is LESS—5.4 percent.

●The Tories spent 5 percent of GDP on education. New Labour's 1997 manifesto promised to spend more, but this government has spent LESS—4.6 percent.

We don't want to go back to the Tory years. But neither do we want New Labour's cuts, privatisations and tax breaks for the rich.

That is why we say support, campaign and vote for the Socialist Alliance and the Scottish Socialist Party.

BIG BUSINESS AND ITS GRIP ON GOVERNMENT

page 5

German protesters blockade nuclear waste train

page 7

What's going on in the \$stock market?

page 10

FOOT AND MOUTH OUTBREAK Don't pity the rural rich

page 8

SCOTLAND

Truth behind drugs debate

page 9

NEW FIGHTS INSIDE THE POST

page 4



Picture: JESS HURD

CATHERINE RICHARDS, a resident of William Rathbone elderly persons' home in Birmingham, was part of a protest on Tuesday against the closure of homes pushed through by the Labour council

Time to build the socialist election campaign now

Conflicting interests in air

NEW LABOUR announced this Tuesday that it was to sell off 49 percent of the National Air Traffic System (NATS) to the Airlines Group consortium, which includes companies like Virgin Atlantic and British Airways.

This is another example of Labour's privatisation madness.

"If the government get away with privatising NATS they can get away with privatising anything."

This is what Mark Serwotka, general secretary elect of the civil servants' PCS union, said at a public meeting on Monday at Heathrow airport in west London.

Privatisation will threaten safety, and workers'

terms and conditions.

The air traffic control unions, PCS and IPMS, have been heavily lobbying for the Airlines Group to get the deal because the other consortium bidding for the contract was led by Serco, a company with a horrific record.

"People are very angry and worried," an air traffic controller told *Socialist Worker*.

"Everybody is totally opposed to privatisation. Over 90 percent of workers in both unions voted for strikes in a consultative ballot earlier this year."

Those votes show the mood to fight privatisation amongst air traffic controllers. Union leaders will need to act on this mood if privatisation is to be stopped.



MARK SERWOTKA (left), air traffic controller Chris Rogers and John Edmonds (right) spoke against privatisation on Monday

Picture: JESS HURD

BONANZA AT THE TOP

SENIOR executives at the Royal Bank of Scotland are to more than double their pay in return for an average performance.

Around 20 executives will get a bonus of one and a half times their salary if the bank reaches the average profits performance of other banks.

This is in addition to existing bonus schemes worth up to 100 percent of salary.

Special bonuses are also being paid to celebrate the bank's takeover of NatWest last year.

Chief executive Fred Goodwin collects £814,000, and Sir George Mathewson, executive deputy chairman, will grab £759,000.

Other board members include Sir Iain Vallance,

also the chair of BT.

●SCHROEDERS, the British investment fund management company, has paid its former chairman Sir Win Bischoff a £5 million "special bonus".

This is his prize for getting the company into the *Financial Times* top 100 share index.

Three other directors shared £2.75 million.

●TREVOR Hilliard, former head of retail banking at Alliance & Leicester, has pocketed a £491,000 payoff on top of his £176,000 salary as his reward for leaving the firm last year.

●FIVE FORMER executives of the Millennium Dome are to receive bonuses totalling £136,000 in recognition of their "remarkable achievement".

did things get better?

Rubbish policy

A COMMITTEE of MPs has rubbished the government's way of dealing with waste.

New Labour is proud that it has set a target to make councils recycle 25 percent of rubbish by 2005 and 33 percent by 2015. But the MPs said the target should be 60 percent.

The report is severely critical of New Labour policies which are encouraging more incinerators. It says unfair subsidies and help from the Private Finance Initiative are funding huge incinerators "by the back door".

Further anguish

LACK OF spending on radiotherapy is leading to women in some parts of Britain unnecessarily having their breasts removed after a cancer diagnosis.

Karol Sirkora, who headed the World Health Organisation's cancer programme for two years, found that surgeons are operating in many parts of Britain because the radiotherapy service is under pressure and waiting lists are long.

Records stopped

METROPOLITAN Police chiefs are refusing to collect full information about stop and search incidents.

The Macpherson inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence said the police should record the reason for stopping people, the outcome of the search, and the ethnic identity of the person stopped.

Ian Blair, deputy commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, said it would be "an unnecessary bureaucratic process" to collect this information.

Black people are five times more likely to be stopped and searched than whites.



Thrown on the scrapheap

STEEL workers could soon be voting on strikes against job losses.

Around 6,000 steel workers, the bulk of them in South Wales and on Teesside, were due to hear their fate this week.

Their employer, Corus, has threatened them with redundancy. The job losses would have devastating consequences in towns that are already hit hard by unemployment.

But they were not expecting to get any sympathy from Corus boss Sir Brian Moffat, the man who gets paid £10,000 a week and who says, "I am interested in making money, not steel."

On Tuesday the ISTC steel union put forward a plan to save jobs. It included short-time working and the company getting half the wage bill paid to the threatened workers in return for a 12-month stay of execution.

But all the indications were that Corus would brush the offer aside.

Corus has made huge profits in the last few years—£578 million in 1994-5, £1,102 million in 1995-6, £451 million in 1996-7 and £315 million in 1997-8.

That money was thrown at shareholders and directors. When British Steel merged with Corus in 1999 shareholders received a "sweetener" of nearly £700 million.

The ISTC has pledged to start a strike ballot at Llanwern, near Newport, and on Teesside if Corus rejects the rescue plan.

The campaign for strikes should start immediately and ought to include all steel workers throughout Britain.

‘Corus boss Sir Brian Moffat gets £10,000 a week’

Dutch unions have already said they will not accept transferred work from closed plants.

The government must also be pressured to act. New Labour says it sympathises with the workers.

That is not enough. The government should renationalise steel.

□THE multinational Procter and Gamble is slashing 9,600 jobs in its plants across the world.

Some 5,600 jobs will go in plants outside the US. Procter and Gamble bosses refuse to say how many workers in their six sites across Britain face the sack.

□ABOUT 350 workers will lose their jobs after JCB bosses announced redundancies last week.



Socialist Review

THE OPPOSITION TO NEW LABOUR

●John Pilger and Gary Younge on elections

●Kevin Danaher on anti-capitalism

Plus: The Israeli state ● The struggles of women workers ● News, reviews and much more

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Chhokar family fighter dropped

A NEW Labour supporter has forced a campaigner fighting for justice for the Chhokar family to officially drop the case.

Aamer Anwar, a trainee solicitor, has been representing the family of Surjit Singh Chhokar. He will now have to do the work in his own time.

Surjit was stabbed to death in Lanarkshire two

years ago.

The three men who were charged with his murder walked free.

Now Dr Raj Jandoo, the head of the inquiry into the Chhokar case, has written to Aamer's employers questioning his involvement. The firm then pulled out.

Aamer has repeatedly challenged Dr Jandoo to hold a full public inquiry.

Public rally

FIGHT HEROIN
LEGALISE CANNABIS
For a new approach to drugs

Sunday 1 April, 2-5pm

13th Note, Clyde Street, Glasgow
Called by the Scottish Socialist Party

what we think

More is at stake than election date

THE DATE of the general election has dominated political discussion this week.

The Tories were looking for an excuse for the election to be put off.

They claimed that this was because of the foot and mouth crisis.

But the truth is the Tories would seize on any excuse to put back an election in which they fear being slaughtered.

Tony Blair was just as opportunist in his desire not to have to delay the election.

He is terrified that the darkening economic situation in the US could soon spread to Britain.

If that happens Gordon Brown's talk of avoiding "boom and bust" would look ridiculous, as factories shut and dole queues lengthen.

Whenever the election comes New Labour and the Tories will unite in pushing a pro-business, pro-market message.

But it is such policies that have made the foot and mouth crisis worse.

The drive to deregulate agriculture

and trade has made the current outbreak much worse than the last one in 1967.

The crisis has been fuelled by the way the market has seen giant firms concentrate production and slaughter of animals, and ship them vast distances purely to boost profit.

Both the Tories and New Labour have cut back on the number of vets in Britain.

And both have presided over the insane workings of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), which every commentator now agrees has made the crisis worse.

MAFF has long been completely subservient to the interests and profits of giant agribusiness corporations and a handful of big farmers.

At the election all the main parties will be recommending even more pro-business policies.

The Socialist Alliance and Scottish Socialist Party will be saying no to market madness whether in agriculture, transport or public services like health and education.

The choice is clear.

Hypocrisy in Balkans

IN THE Balkans we have once again seen people burned out of their homes and forced to flee for their lives.

Two years ago Tony Blair and Western governments launched their bombing of Kosovo and Serbia.

They justified it by saying that Serbian forces were using military power and terror to drive Albanians from their homes.

Today it is the Macedonian government that is using military force and terror to drive Albanians from their homes.

Again Britain is sending troops, but this time they are going to back up Macedonia.

The contrast shows that the fate of ordinary people, Albanian or any other, is irrelevant to the Western powers.

The West simply uses concern for the victims to win public backing for military intervention.

Such intervention is about securing the West's interests by shoring up whichever regimes it thinks best guarantee freedom for Western business and the repayment of bankers' debts.

It is those debts and the West's bombing which are bleeding the Balkans dry, condemning its people to poverty, and stoking up a tinder box of ethnic hatred.



Picture: JESS HURD

Standing up for refugees

SOME 1,000 people united in central London last Saturday in protest at the Tory and New Labour witch-hunting of refugees.

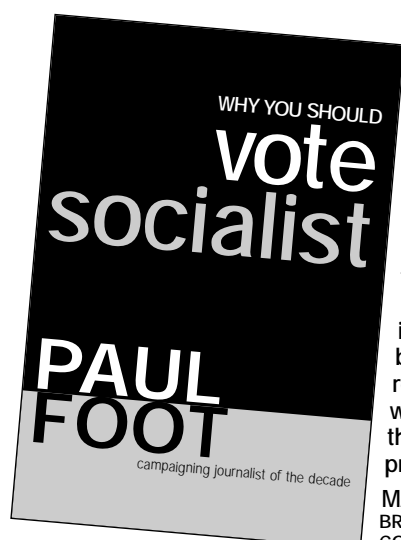
Despite William Hague's promise not to play the race

card in the election, the Tories were this week exposed for making an anti-refugee election broadcast.

It features caricatures of Eastern European refugees and suggests they are to

blame for problems in Britain.

New Labour publicly condemned the broadcast. But home secretary Jack Straw was trying to outdo the Tories by chartering private planes to deport asylum seekers.



OUT NOW

‘As usual Paul Foot is bang on the money, which is the most important place to be. Essential reading for anyone with doubts about the New Labour project.’

MARK THOMAS
BROADCASTER AND COMEDIAN

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Socialist Alliance rallies

NOTTINGHAM: Thursday 29 March, 7.30pm, Comfort Hotel, George Street. Speakers include Mark Serwotka.

DONCASTER: Thursday 5 April, 8pm, Railway pub, West Street.

WELSH SOCIALIST ALLIANCE—NEATH: Thursday 5 April, 7.30pm, Castle Hotel, town centre.

BIRMINGHAM: Sunday 8 April. Speakers include Mark Steel and Caroline Johnson. Phone 0121 449 0787 for venue and time.

HOVE: Thursday 12 April, 8pm, Portslade Town Hall, Victoria Road.

London rally

Speakers include

Louise Christian

Socialist Alliance prospective parliamentary candidate

Paul Foot

Campaigning journalist of the decade

Mark Serwotka

PCS general secretary elect, personal capacity

Liz Davies

Former member of Labour's National Executive

Tuesday 3 April, 7.30pm

Friends House

Euston Road (Euston station)

Entrance £1



SPARKS
FLYWinning
trail

SOME 500 strikers at Willerby Caravans in Hull marched through the city last week to a mass strike meeting.

They are on indefinite strike against short term contracts for workers.

●Full story page 15

UCL go
global

OVER 100 people attended a Globalise Resistance conference at University College London (UCL) last week.

They heard George Monbiot and Barry Coates speak alongside Green Party and Socialist Alliance candidates.

Dan Ozarow, UCL student union education and welfare officer, chaired the final rally and said, "It is fantastic to see so many ideas being discussed."

"Finally students across London are starting to become aware of the injustices in the world and are coming together to do something about them."

A large contingent from UCL now plan to go to the Genoa protest.

●Steve Smith

Hitting
the roof

NEARLY 150 students protested outside the university council meeting in Durham last week as part of a campaign against a 10 percent rent rise.

The protest closed down the main entrances into the building as students hung paper chains across the gates to symbolise the hardship of poor students.

The university authorities pushed through with the £270 rise in rent.

Further action is planned to avert more rises next year.

●Paul Leake

Plymouth
march on

ABOUT 300 Plymouth council workers and their supporters marched last Saturday against the Tory-run council's cuts.

About 5,400 workers have taken industrial action this month. "We are still insisting on no compulsory redundancies," says UNISON union branch secretary Tony Staunton.

●Full story page 14

Ballot in
Berks

FIREFIGHTERS and control room staff in Berkshire are balloting for strike action over the threat to eight full time jobs.

"The dispute with the authority has been going on for ages," one FBU union member told *Socialist Worker*. "All we are asking for is existing staffing levels to be met and a proper review, which would mean more firefighters."

"Instead we are getting cuts under the government's so called 'Best Value' scheme."

The ballot result is due on 18 April.

Team Valley

Support is
sweeping in

THE 120 factory workers at Team Valley Brush in Gateshead have launched a support group with the help of the Socialist Alliance on Tyne-side after three weeks on indefinite strike.

The dispute began after workers were offered an insulting pay rise of 1 percent on their miserable £3.08 an hour.

Company chairman Peter Wheeldon refuses to pay the minimum wage as the basic hourly rate, so workers have to rely on overtime and bonuses to make up their wage.

"He still thinks women go out to work for pocket money," says picket Kathleen Hope, "and now he's advertising our jobs for £3.70 an hour at Blaydon job centre."

The strikers have won tremendous support from local workers. Nearly £500 was donated or pledged at the support group launch

meeting, with contributions from UNISON, MSF and GMB union branches, Gateshead Trades Council, the Socialist Alliance, former Spartan Redheugh steel workers, and many individuals.

Kenny Bell, secretary of Newcastle council UNISON branch, chaired the meeting, which over 50 strikers attended.

Raised

He urged strikers to attend the rally for a living wage in Manchester on 28 April.

Kenny Bell introduced Terry Rodgers, Socialist Alliance prospective parliamentary candidate for Tynebridge, and said, "There is a meltdown of local government with the drive to privatise nearly all core services."

"Questions must be asked about unions' support for the Labour Party."

Other speakers included



ON THE picket line against low pay

Shirley Winter, who organised support for the Magnet strikers two years ago, and Yunus Bakhsh from UNISON's Newcastle City Health branch and a member of its national executive committee.

Six strikers raised nearly £250 outside Gateshead Civic Centre the following day.

"We've been invited to go to Glasgow to collect," says Kathleen Hope, "and four of the lasses have

agreed to go up this week."

Solidarity can help these strikers turn the screw on management. "This is a strike we can win," says shop steward June Patterson.

●Tony Dowling

■Donations payable to Team Valley Brush Hardship Fund, 58 Park Terrace, Swalwell, Gateshead NE16 3BU.

■Solidarity rally: Tuesday 3 April, 7.30am, Swalwell Bank, Gateshead

Battle lines drawn in the post

Strike to stop
sexist abuse

A POSTAL workers' strike spread across a large part of Scotland at the start of this week.

Over 1,000 workers at the giant office in the Springburn area of Glasgow struck on Monday when a manager returned to the office despite being disciplined for sexually harassing a 16 year old woman.

By Tuesday afternoon some 25 offices in the West of Scotland had joined the action.

The strike at Springburn was launched by a group of 40 women workers who refused to work with the manager.

There were 300 CWU union members on the picket line on Tuesday.

One picket told *Socialist Worker*, "Royal Mail has a total double standard. If you're a worker, especially if you're an activist, and you so much as sneeze at the wrong moment then you'll be disciplined and up for the sack."

"But if you're a manager then you can get away with anything. We want this man sacked, off the premises and out of the post entirely."

Disgracefully, the national union leaders instantly repudiated the strike.

But postal workers in other parts of Scotland and in the rest of Britain were preparing to support Glasgow strikers by blacking their mail.

This is a crucial struggle which

shows that it is workers who really care about equality in the workplace.

A victory will be a real blow against bullying management.

□ABOUT 350 postal workers in Bedford struck for 24 hours last week after management attacked arrangements for deliveries.

"There are provisions to cover emergencies, which have become the norm" a Bedford CWU union member told *Socialist Worker*. "Essentially they are trying to undermine the second delivery."

The strike forced concessions. Management has agreed to create some new jobs and to protect essential elements of the normal delivery structure.



POST WORKER, written by rank and file postal workers, is available from 0958 478 631

Activists meet

ABOUT 60 postal workers from 14 union branches met last weekend to discuss the implications of recent unofficial strikes, and how to defend activists from victimisation and bullying.

The meeting was called by the Liverpool, Oxford and South East Wales branches. The turnout was excellent, despite a sustained propaganda campaign by national leaders to stop people going.

The meeting heard repeated accounts of management's bullying.

A worker from Crewe told how during a recent dispute, when Crewe workers had not done the work of the striking Liverpool office, management had taken aside a few workers and pressured them to start scabbing.

One worker was so harassed he was physically sick.

Another was told, "You know that mortgage application I signed for you this week? If you don't start

working I'll have it off you."

But to their great credit Crewe workers stood firm.

Eight union reps are under disciplinary investigation after the recent Oxford strike, and one worker has been sacked in Crewe.

In Cardiff management tried to discipline a rep for "putting on their coat in a provocative way".

Launch

An Oxford CWU member told the meeting, "I've always recognised we have two enemies. One is obviously the Post Office, but the other is our national union leaders."

"There are elements in our union who would be quite happy to see a cull of activists. They regard the people who fight back as an 'irritant'."

The meeting did not take formal decisions.

But there was a general consensus to campaign for the union to launch a national strike ballot if there are any sackings as a result of strikes.

LONDON PREPARES FOR A FIGHT

LONDON COULD be hit by major official post strikes in the run-up to the general election.

Workers at the East London Mail Centre in Whitechapel have voted for action in response to management's failure to keep to national agreements, its refusal to follow the industrial relations framework, and because of a dispute over working practices.

At the same time workers at the NDO office in London are to vote on strikes over the threatened closure of their office and the loss of 1,300 jobs locally.

Ballots are also happening

in other parts of the capital.

The votes come as the government took another step towards privatising the Post Office this week.

Confrontation between a militant, well organised workforce and the government is coming closer.

The Post Office formally changed its name to Consignia on Monday of this week as it received an operating licence from the postal regulator (PostComm) to deliver mail.

Consignia will have the structures of a public limited company.

The regulator could have announced at the same time that he was allowing private

firms to start delivering mail.

But to PostComm and the government's intense embarrassment, not a single private operator has applied for a licence at this stage of bidding.

Nonsense

This makes a nonsense of the claim often heard from New Labour and the Post Office that dozens of companies have the capacity to take on the Post Office.

However, several big firms are preparing to move into lucrative parts of the market, but only if they get more concessions from the government.

The threat of competition

is being used in an effort to break resistance by postal workers to speed-ups, "flexibility" and worse conditions.

A CWU union member at the East London Mail Centre told *Socialist Worker* this week, "Management think that all they have to do is say 'the regulator' and we'll hide in the corner. I can assure them that it isn't going to work like that."

CWU national leaders are running scared of the government and the regulator.

It is up to the rank and file and the local leaderships to step up and coordinate the resistance which has proved successful in beating back management's attacks.

BLAIR'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE RICH

The big business grip on Labour

THE RECENT scandals involving Peter Mandelson, Keith Vaz, Geoffrey Robinson and the Hinduja brothers show the degree to which New Labour ministers are connected with the rich and powerful.

More than this, every level of government under Labour is now dominated by big business.

Every aspect of government policy is connected to the needs of the corporations and always ensures the needs of the wealthy come first.

Tony Blair claims to be green. But his "green speeches" have been on the platform of the Green Alliance, which no ordinary person can join, but that any corporation can if it pays £2,500.

Firms which back the Green Alliance include Thames Water, the company fined the most for polluting, as well as Shell, BP-Amoco GlaxoSmithKline and electricity generator National Power.

Peter Hain MP, during his time at the Foreign Office, issued a pamphlet at the end of January called *The End of Foreign Policy?*

It argues that foreign policy should be based on "global responsibility" and "ecological sustainability".

The pamphlet was issued through the Green Alliance, whose longest running backer is mining company Rio Tinto. The press release for Hain's pamphlet even said it was "supported by Rio Tinto".

Trade minister Richard Caborn recently announced government backing for the "Worldaware

Awards", which "recognise the contribution the private sector makes towards integrating developing countries into the global economy".

The award for long term commitment to the developing world is sponsored by Rio Tinto.

The award for sustainable development is sponsored by Shell.

International development minister Clare Short backs the idea that globalisation helps the poor.

Her department's website says that it has hired the country's most expensive accountants, PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC), as consultants on some 44 different projects.

Cost? Around £400 an hour.

Appalling

The multinationals Gap and Nike have hired PWC to oversee their "ethical" audits which, they claim, show they are not responsible for hiring children to work in appalling conditions.

Professor Dara O'Rourke of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the US went with PWC to inspect factories in China and Korea.

The professor reported at the end of last year that PWC had a pro-management bias, did not uncover the use of carcinogenic chemicals, and failed to recognise that some employees were forced to work over 80 hours a week.

PWC overlooked the absence of safety guards on machines, and could not distinguish between a company-run union and an independent one.

PWC advises New Labour on its Private Finance Initiative (PFI)

schemes and was recently appointed by the government to run a PFI training programme.

The links between New Labour, lobby companies and big business are very important when it comes to New Labour's favourite policy—privatisation.

Among the areas to get the New Labour sell-off treatment are the Criminal Records Bureau and its task of issuing new criminal record certificates for millions of job applicants.

Shortlisted to get the contract are Capita, PWC and Serco.

Oil companies, financial consultants and building firms which have donated staff to the Treasury for free have then won lucrative government contracts, according to the *Observer*.

The companies involved in this scheme include PWC, Ernst and Young, BP-Amoco and Esso, and building contractor Tarmac.

The gravy train works in the other direction as well.

Former MEP Carole Tongue has got a job with lobby firm Citigate Westminster.

Among the clients her new firm deals with is energy giant Enron.

Enron is a US firm which has donated to New Labour for the past three years. Its top man in Europe, Ralph Hodge, was given a CBE in the New Year's Honours list.

Hodge said he would use "any channel" to overturn Labour's support for a moratorium on new gas-fired power stations.

Enron was initially allowed exemptions, and now New Labour has junked the policy.

TONY BLAIR with Lady Rothermere and Rupert Murdoch

Bosses in key positions

FROM ITS first weeks in power Labour appointed fat cats to key positions:

●**LORD SIMON:** As chairman of BP-Amoco he lobbied against oil taxation. Made minister for trade and competitiveness in Europe at the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). Negotiated the removal of controls on the energy market.

●**CHRIS FAY:** Chairman and chief executive of Shell UK, and president of the UK Offshore Oil Operators' Association, which has fiercely resisted environmental legislation. Made chairman of New Labour's advisory committee on business and the environment, and then became head of the G8's global taskforce on renewable energy.

●**JUDITH HANRATTY:** Company secretary of BP-Amoco, appointed to the board of the government's

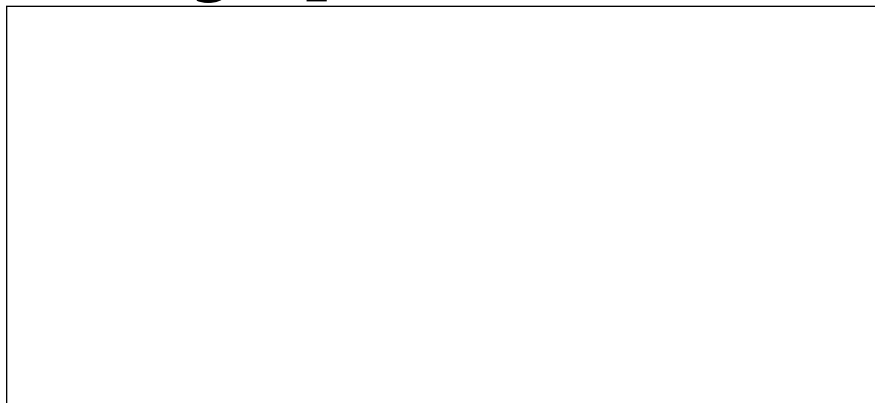
Competition Commission, which regulates mergers.

●**EWEN CAMERON:** President of the Country Landowners' Association, where he opposed the government's right to roam policy. He was then put in charge of the Countryside Agency, which is responsible for implementing the right to roam.

●**SIR PETER DAVIS:** Chief executive of Reed International, where he sent 900 employees from work to welfare. Appointed chairman of the New Deal taskforce responsible for moving people from welfare to work.

●**JOHN BOWMAN:** Director of Commercial Union, accused of mis-selling its pensions. He was appointed to the board of the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority.

●**DINAH NICHOLS:** Non-executive director of Anglian Water, which was



BLAIR WITH a Hinduja brother and Peter Mandelson

prosecuted six times for pollution. Appointed director general of environmental protection at the Department of the Environment.

●**IAN McCALLISTER:** Chairman of Ford. Appointed vice-chairman of the government's Cleaner Vehicles Taskforce.

●**ROBERT OSBORNE:** Head of special projects at

construction firm Tarmac, a major builder of PFI hospitals. Appointed chief executive of the Department of Health's Private Finance Unit. Then went back to Tarmac to run its PFI division.

●**LORD SAINSBURY:** Chairman of the giant supermarket chain. Made a minister in the DTI, which

regulates competition policy. Also chairman of the Food Chain Group, which represents food retailers on the government's Foresight Programme. As science minister he led a delegation of biotech companies to the US.

●**LORD HOLLICK:** Media baron, made adviser to DTI on competition policy.

MINISTERS' CONNECTIONS

WE KNOW about Blair, Mandelson and Keith Vaz's connections with the billionaire Hinduja brothers.

But what about Patricia Hewitt?

The Leicester West MP is also "e-commerce" minister.

She "received

hospitality" from the Hinduja brothers in both London and Bombay, and saw one of the brothers at the DTI.

Hewitt used to be head of research at Andersen Consulting (now called Accenture), the firm the Hinduja brothers have now hired to look at its "e-commerce" restructuring.

Fat cat favours

LOOK WHO featured in the New Year's Honours list:

●**JOHN JEREMY COCKBURN (OBE):** Canadian operations director for engineering and arms manufacturer British Aerospace (BAE).

●**IAN ANSELL (MBE):** BAE senior systems engineer.

●**FRANK MOYES (MBE):** BAE Trident nuclear submarine navigation team leader.

●**JULIAN BLOGH (CBE):** Chief executive of Ultra Electronics, which supplies BAE and others' warplanes.

inside the system

THINGS THEY SAY

"FACE THE truth, Tony. You're the first Labour leader to go into a general election without a single Tory celebrity threatening to leave the country if you win."

■Mirror columnist BRIAN READE

"WHO nowadays believes in the unerring accuracy, the irresistible force, of NATO weaponry—apart, that is, from the long lasting destructive power of depleted uranium?"

■JOHN SIMPSON, BBC correspondent in Serbia during the Kosovo war

"IT WAS indeed stupid and wrong for NATO pilots to bomb the Serbs from 15,000 feet, especially as they missed so many of their targets."

■JOHN SIMPSON

"GRIMSBY IS the most profitable town in Britain."

■Report by DUN & BRADSHEET STATISTICIANS

"UNEMPLOYMENT is twice the national average. Weekly earnings are the lowest in the area. It is among the most socially deprived regions. If you tell low paid people here that companies in Grimsby are making a profit it's a bit of an insult, isn't it?"

■IVAN HINCHCLIFFE, economic and community development officer for North East Lincolnshire council

"HE IS accustomed to large projects and has skills in heavy capital expenditure, where you are almost betting the company and cannot afford to get it wrong. He is quietly spoken but charismatic."

■CITY SOURCE on news that Sir John Parker was to become the new chairman of Railtrack

"HIS late withdrawal due to personal circumstances is obviously disappointing."

■Current chairman of Railtrack SIR PHILIP BECK after news that Parker had to pull out

DO YOU have a story for Inside the System? Send it to Inside the System, Socialist Worker, PO Box 82 London E3 3LH

Ethics behind crowd control

THE NEXT big meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is to be held in the repressive Middle East state of Qatar.

This is to avoid the giant mobilisations

against the multinationals and financial institutions seen in Seattle, Prague and Naples, and that we are going to see in Genoa in July.

New Labour is a key supporter of the new

round of trade talks that will allow the multinationals to continue to ride roughshod over the poorest people in the world.

But the British government has provided other aid to Qatar to help ensure that the WTO conference runs smoothly.

Over the past two years New Labour has licensed the sale of anti-riot guns, assault rifles, crowd control ammunition, CS gas grenades and shotguns to Qatar.

No doubt the regime will use these weapons in an "ethical" manner against anyone who protests at the WTO.

Price is right

MORE NEWS on ethical arms sales.

The Ukrainian police recently used teargas and truncheons against people demonstrating against President Leonid Kuchma. Britain has exported projectile launchers, small arms, small arms ammunition and telescopic sights to Ukraine.

The army in Ecuador used teargas and live bullets on a popular uprising against the International Monetary Fund in February. Eight people died.

Britain has exported semi-automatic pistols, projectile launcher parts, sniper rifles and half a million pounds worth of high-tech kit to Ecuador.

Huge protests brought down the corrupt Peruvian president, Alberto Fujimori, last year despite the best efforts of the British government which allowed assault rifles, sub-machine guns, sniper rifles, telescopic sights and night vision goggles to be exported to Peru.

★ **THE current crisis in the economy is causing some capitalists to try anything to get stock market prices back up.**

One ruined investor in Italy has stolen the corpse of Ennio Cuccia, the former chairman of the giant Mediobanco firm.

He says he will only return the body when the Italian stock market recovers to last year's level.

He listed living financiers and journalists as new targets.

TRADE SECRET

THE NEWSPAPERS have been full of articles about how the outbreak of foot and mouth is affecting the tourist trade and the small businesses that survive on it.

The *Daily Telegraph* ran an article in March by Cornish bed and breakfast owner Gill Charlton and Lake District hotelier Charles Garside explaining how the tourist industry had been affected by the crisis.

The *Telegraph* failed to explain that these were no ordinary business people.

Charlton is a former travel editor at the newspaper, and Garside used to edit the *European* before getting a huge payoff from his former employers.



Come on all you voters

DISGRACED ex cabinet minister Peter Mandelson is seeking consolation in the exploits of his local football team, Hartlepool.

Mandelson is the MP for the area. After hardly attending a match in four years, he has appeared at the last two games with his election agent in tow.

The Tory candidate in the forthcoming general election, Gus Robinson, has also started to attend games.

Some cynical souls have suggested that Mandelson hopes to gain favour (and votes) from local people as he faces a electoral challenge from Arthur Scargill, leader of the National Union of Mineworkers.

Breakfast club

RIGHT WING papers like the *Sun* and the *Daily Mail* have attacked Labour MP Keith Vaz for his links with solicitor Sarosh Zaiwalla, but the Tories have been strangely quiet about the case.

Zaiwalla has socialised with the rich and powerful, including top

In the stars?

NEW EVIDENCE of how money can influence university research emerged last week.

Southampton University announced that it was founding a research group into astrology. This coincidentally came after it received funding from an astrology-promoting body called the Sophia Trust.

One project will look into the "apparent relationship" between the position of Jupiter at the time of birth, and future alcoholism and drug dependency.

Another group will research "whether the success rates of IVF and other fertility treatments could be improved by coinciding treatment sessions with movements in the star charts of couples hoping to conceive".

comment

The IMF vice on Argentina

A FEW weeks ago Turkey was being broken on the wheel of the neo-liberal Washington consensus. Now it is Argentina.

It is barely a fortnight ago that the newly appointed economy minister, Ricardo López Murphy, announced a two year austerity programme of \$4.5 billion spending cuts.

The result was a political explosion. Three cabinet ministers resigned, along with six other government officials.

Trade unions launched a series of general strikes while students mounted protests across the country.

So last week President Fernando de la Rúa replaced López Murphy with Domingo Cavallo. Cavallo had served as economy minister before, under President Carlos Menem between 1991 and 1996.

During that time he acquired an enormous reputation in business circles as architect of Argentina's economic "miracle".

The first half of the 1990s was the era of the emerging markets boom, when Western capital poured into Latin America in search of quick profits.

Cavallo reassured foreign investors by imposing savage austerity measures and pegging the Argentinian peso to the US dollar. Between 1990 and 1998 Argentina grew by 60 percent compared to 25 percent in Mexico and Brazil.

Sour

But during the second half of the 1990s the emerging market boom turned sour.

The financial crashes first in Mexico in 1994-5 and then in South East Asia in 1997-8 scared off foreign investment.

De la Rúa, elected president in 1999, promised to bring an end to economic stagnation and political corruption. His economy minister, José Luis Machinea, predicted that the economy would rise by at least 4 percent in 2000.

By May last year his spending cuts were provoking mass protests. In October the left wing vice-president resigned in protest at the government's failure to deal with corruption.

The political crisis meant the government was unable to raise money on the international capital markets.

So de la Rúa turned to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for help.

True to form, the IMF demanded large scale spending cuts designed to reduce government borrowing as the price of the \$40 billion aid package announced last December.

By March the situation was desperate. The financial crisis in Turkey made investors even more wary of Argentina.

The Institute for International Finance predicted that Argentina would only grow by 1 percent this year, and warned that there was "considerable downside risk" even on this prediction.

President de la Rúa then appointed López Murphy

‘Instead of the military dictatorship of the past, Argentina is now confronted by a market dictatorship’

■LIANA CISNEROS, head of Latin American Campaign Against Debt

as economy minister to implement the austerity programme demanded by the IMF.

According to the *Financial Times*, "Markets cheered the appointment of Mr López Murphy, who is viewed as an orthodox economist and fiscal hawk."

But his austerity measures caused the disintegration of the governing coalition.

The left of centre Frepaso party abandoned the government. The opposition Peronists, who control several states in Argentina, also refused to cooperate with López Murphy's programme. So the president brought in Cavallo to replace him. But the change of economy ministers hasn't altered the basic thrust of government policy.

As the *Guardian* pointed out, "Mr Cavallo's first act will not be to announce a Keynesian reflation programme involving cheaper money and increases in spending. Instead he will have to ram a \$3 billion package of cuts through parliament."

Debts

Argentina is caught in a vice that is being tightened by the IMF.

As ever, the fund's overriding concern is to ensure that the country honours its debts to foreign investors.

One option would be to cut interest rates and devalue the currency, making Argentinean exports more competitive. But it would be even harder to repay the foreign debt.

Argentina could default on these debts instead. Why should working people and the poor suffer to keep the financial markets happy?

Such an option is, though, from the IMF's point of view, absolute heresy.

But even the *Financial Times's* neo-liberal columnist Martin Wolf says that "an orderly debt restructuring would be preferable to chaos".

An Argentinian default would also be a blow against the idea that poor countries must keep paying to feed the financial vultures.

■ALEX CALLINICOS

ANGER AT NUCLEAR THREAT

German protesters block atom waste

Vote slide

TWO regional elections in Germany have shown the depth of disillusionment with official politics, particularly with the leaders of the Greens.

Ten million people were eligible to vote in Rhineland Palatinate and Baden Wurtemberg.

The turnout in both elections was down sharply.

The Greens only just managed to secure the 5 percent needed to get seats in the state parliaments. Their vote was down 4 percent in Baden Wurtemberg, once a strong area for them.

Their electoral slide is wholly down to the right wing positions adopted by Green representatives in government.

The Nazi Republikaner party fell below the 5 percent hurdle there.

ANTI-NUCLEAR protesters clashed with police in Germany this week as they tried to block the transport of nuclear waste.

Some 16,000 people demonstrated in Luneberg on Saturday. Thousands more gathered on Tuesday. The main protests were planned for Wednesday as *Socialist Worker* went to press.

The German government launched one of the biggest police mobilisations since the Second World War to try to prevent protesters from blockading the rail transports.

Some 30,000 police and troops tried to hem in protesters, and broke up campsites at the weekend where thousands of people had gathered.

But local people opened their homes to the protesters and provided them with food. School students occupied to provide people with somewhere to sleep.

Even many farmers joined the protest, blockading the road with 300 tractors.

Churches provided refuge and church wardens handed out tea and coffee.

The police and government response has infuriated the protesters and shocked public opinion.

The government is led by the Social Democrats, equivalent to the Labour Party in Britain, and includes the Greens as a junior partner.

Three years ago, leading Green figures such as Joschka Fischer and Jurgen Trittin helped lead similar protests against the transport of uranium and plutonium.

‘Veterans of 1980s protests locked arms with young demonstrators’

Now Fischer is foreign minister and Trittin is environment minister. They have set their face against the protests.

Despite that, large numbers of Green members joined the blockades this week.

Veterans of anti-nuclear protests in the early 1980s linked arms with young demonstrators.

And people drew the links between the nuclear power industry and multinationals

The blockades and the police reaction have added to the growing sense of radicalisation in Germany.

●**Eyewitness report by Hans Krause**

PROTESTERS DEFIED a huge police mobilisation

Is Trident even legal?

THREE law lords in Scotland were to rule on Friday of this week whether the Trident nuclear weapons system is legal or not.

The law lords were to deliver their ruling in the High Court in Edinburgh at 10am.

They were also considering what rights citizens have to break the law in order to prevent the state from committing war crimes.

The High Court ruling follows the acquittal in 1999 of three women accused of causing £80,000 of criminal damage to a Trident support boat.

It may take some time to fully digest the lengthy ruling, and campaigners were not expecting a simple judgement.

Trident Ploughshares and Scottish CND were calling on people to support an all night candlelit vigil outside the High Court from 5pm on Thursday.

They are asking for everyone who can to attend the court on Friday morning.

On Saturday 7 April there will be also be further protests at the Faslane

Trident base.

Protesters will be there to celebrate if Trident has been ruled illegal, and to continue the protests if the law lords let Trident off on a technicality.

■**Protest against Trident, Saturday 7 April. Assemble Faslane north gate from 11am. Phone Scottish CND on 0141 423 1222, or Trident Ploughshares on 01324 880 744 for more details.**

■**For transport to Faslane from Edinburgh on 7 April phone 0131 554 9209.**

□**CND IS also planning to protest against the US government's National Missile Defence (NMD) plan.**

Demonstrators will gather outside Downing Street to demand that Tony Blair says no to any US government request to use the Fylingdales early warning radar base in north Yorkshire as part of NMD.

Bring banners, whistles and musical instruments to make sure Blair hears!

■**Say no to Star Wars. Saturday 14 April, 12 noon, Downing Street, London. Phone 020 7700 4524 for more details.**

international round-up

□**THE ONGOING** movement against the far right in Austria has inflicted significant losses on the Freedom Party in elections in the capital, Vienna.

The Freedom Party is a junior partner to the Tory People's Party in the Austrian government, and won 29 percent of the vote in a general election 18 months ago.

But on Sunday its vote in council elections in Vienna,

home to one in five Austrians, fell to just over 20 percent.

The Social Democrats, equivalent to the Labour Party in Britain, increased their vote to 48 percent and the Greens took 12 percent.

The Freedom Party and its leading figure, Jorg Haider, ran an anti-immigrant campaign and hurled abuse at Ariel Muzicant, a leading Jewish figure.

However the racist and

anti-Semitic scapegoating did not reverse widespread disillusionment with the governing parties which have forced through free market policies of cuts in welfare and increased taxes on workers.

□**SOME 30,000 people** protested in Hungary last week against plans to give employers the right to disperse workers throughout the country as they see fit.

Public meetings

ZAPATISTAS A CHALLENGE TO THE NEW WORLD ORDER

GLASGOW: Wednesday 4 April, 7.30pm, Room W110, Hamish Wood Building, Caledonian University. Speaker: Mike Gonzalez

EDINBURGH: Thursday 5 April, 7.30pm, Blind Poet, West Nicholson Street. Speaker: Mike Gonzalez

TYNESIDE: Friday 6 April, 7.30pm, St John's Church Hall, Grainger Street, Newcastle upon Tyne.

CARDIFF: Saturday 7 April, 6pm, Wallace Lecture Theatre, Cardiff University, Park Place.

BRISTOL: Sunday 8 April, 2pm, Malcolm X Centre, City Road, St Pauls. Speaker: Chris Harman

LEEDS: Monday 9 April, 8pm, Congreve Rooms, West Yorkshire Playhouse. Speaker: Mike Gonzalez

MANCHESTER: Tuesday 10 April, 7.30pm, Cross Street Chapel, Cross Street. Speaker: Mike Gonzalez

SHEFFIELD: Wednesday 11 April, 7.30pm, Central United Reformed Church, Norfolk Street, opposite Crucible.

GET TO GENOA

THE GREEK TUC has just voted to back the anti-capitalist protests against the leaders of the world's richest countries meeting in Genoa, Italy on 20-22 July.

High on the G8 summit agenda in Genoa are plans to help global capital grab control of social services, education, health pensions, immigration and democratic rights.

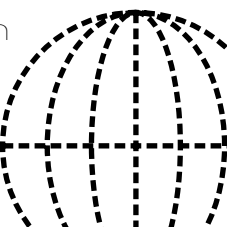
The Greek TUC announced, "We call on working people, the Labour Centres, Trade Union Federations and local unions to actively support the international mobilisation in Genoa."

BOOK YOUR PLACE NOW

Globalise Resistance has booked a train and ferry seats from Dover to Genoa, which leaves Dover 19 July and returns 22 July.

This costs £120 per person, which includes two nights accommodation on the train.

●Phone 020 8980 3005 or visit www.resist.org.uk to book your place.



Foot and mouth

Don't pity rural rich

FARMERS ARE screaming that the foot and mouth outbreak has caused a crisis in agriculture.

This view is backed up by the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*, which condemn urban dwellers for ignoring the farming community's plight.

They gloss over the fact that there are two types of farmers—the rich landowners who run agribusiness, and the poor farm labourers.

The rural rich have made fat profits out of the farming industry.

They argue that farming has been in recession since 1995 and plead poverty.

But this came after a boom. The average income from farming doubled in just five years from 1990 to 1995. It hit its highest level for well over 30 years.

The agribusinesses also reaped £3.1 billion in government subsidy last year.

But they drove through cost cutting measures at the same time, like any other bosses.

They cut 11 percent of farm workers' jobs last year before foot and mouth took hold.

The rich farmers are now facing a crisis of their own making.

It is the logic of market forces running agriculture where profits come first while food safety and animal welfare come last.

Mad

These are the same big farmers who put animal parts in feed for other animals to eat, with BSE mad cow disease as a result. Their profiteering means an unknown number of people will die from CJD, the human form of BSE.

These big farmers run the majority of the countryside.

Two thirds of all the land is in the hands of the biggest 16 percent of farms.

Some 17 percent of businesses in pig farming own over 80 percent of the total pig industry.

This same concentration of wealth is seen in the poultry industry.

Just 1.1 percent of all poultry farmers own 78.5 percent of the total industry.

The National Farmers Union is dominated by these agribusiness fat cats.

It moaned last week, "Dark days are stretching ahead of farmers and many are at their wits' end, not knowing how to make ends meet."

But the top 7 percent of farms made an average net profit of over £50,000 last year.

The top cereal farmers were making over £100,000 a year in the mid-1990s. They are still raking in over £50,000 a year in profit now.

The businessmen behind these giant farms try and exploit the plight of small farmers to demand government subsidies for "farming".

Small farmers have

'Rich farmers are now facing a crisis of their own making'

suffered. They work long hours to try to keep afloat in the same way a corner shop owner does in the face of competition from giant supermarkets.

Their income has dropped massively, and many have been forced to give up their farms.

They can cripple small farmers by forcing them to take a cut-throat rate for their produce while hiking up prices on the supermarket shelves.

Now the big farmers are pretending they have a common cause with small farmers to grab more subsidies.

This would boost their own profits while continuing to drive the small farmers out of business.

Subsidy money doesn't help hard-hit small farmers. Around 80 percent of the subsidies go to just 20 percent of farmers—the biggest.

New Labour has come under intense pressure from the big farmers. It has already given into pressure from the Countryside Alliance farming lobby over banning hunting.

Lords

Dozens of New Labour lords backed a motion that kept hunting when the bill returned to committee stage on Monday of this week.

The government's solution to the foot and mouth outbreak again helps the big farmers. It says, "The key to rebuilding farm incomes will be a restructuring and faster productivity growth."

"Restructuring does, of course, mean a faster rundown in the number of farms, and the numbers of people working in farming."

So New Labour will help the big farmers, like any City businessmen, to sack workers, bankrupt the small farmers, and concentrate even more land and wealth in the hands of the biggest farmers and a few giant agribusinesses.

LIZ DAVIES BACKS SOCIALIST ELECTION CHALLENGE

Why I left New Labour

LIZ DAVIES was until last year a member of Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC). This is its highest elected body. She announced on Friday of last week that she is leaving the Labour Party and lending her support to Socialist Alliance candidates at the general election. She is also supporting candidates from local left groups such as the Leeds Left Alliance at the general election. Liz Davies spoke to Socialist Worker about New Labour, the left and the prospects for socialists.

WHY HAVE YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE THE LABOUR PARTY?

I JOINED the Labour Party in 1979, shortly after Thatcher was elected. The party has changed—I haven't.

My record as a Labour Party activist is extremely important to me, and if I was back in 1979 I would still have joined. What's changed is that the Labour Party has been taken over by New Labour.

After much deliberation and a great deal of thought, I have concluded that there is absolutely no possibility of bringing the Labour Party back to values of redistribution of wealth and of civil liberties.

These are values that most Labour Party members believe in, but New Labour doesn't.

WHAT HAPPENED TO BRING YOU TO THAT DECISION?

I STOOD for the national executive in 1998 and 1999. I got elected by ordinary party members under one member one vote.

But about a year ago I decided not to stand again.

It's been an accumulation of issues. The Asylum Act in particular is a horrendous, wicked piece of legislation. I found myself very shocked that a Labour government could put that forward.

I have been profoundly shocked by Jack Straw's record as home secretary.

There was nothing in the manifesto about abolishing the right to trial by jury.

Then there is the whole economic direction of the government towards tax breaks for the rich, the widening gap between rich and poor.

We have the lowest corporation tax in Europe. Big business obviously benefits from privatisation.

According to the latest available figures, 1998 and 1999, for the first time in the party's history contributions from big business equalled contributions from the trade unions.

We have seen from all the sleaze scandals that New Labour is unapologetic about that and wants to increase contributions from big business.

Party members are horrified at a lot of the donors to New Labour: arms manufacturers such as BAe and Raytheon; a power company called Enron Europe, which has been the only corporation condemned by Amnesty International for human rights abuses; all the major supermarkets; and so on.

Clearly the 1997 manifesto was to a large extent New Labour, but it did contain some elements that the labour movement had been fighting for—the minimum wage, trade union recognition and a few others.

They have, of course, been watered down, and New Labour has gone further in the direction of Thatcherite policies.

There is no doubt that a

second term New Labour government will not even feel the need to acknowledge the limited progressive policies that were there in 1997.

Sitting on the NEC and the national policy forum for two years, watching New Labour abuse, control, and try to shut down every possible expression of dissent and opinion, led me to the conclusion that there is no possibility of changing the party back.

In the constituency where I live I will be voting Labour because I will be voting for Diane Abbott, and I am a very strong supporter of the few socialist Labour MPs and candidates who remain.

But in general terms giving out leaflets asking for a vote for New Labour is something that I didn't feel I could do.

THERE IS NOW A GULF BETWEEN OFFICIAL POLITICS AND PUBLIC OPINION OVER A RANGE OF ISSUES. HOW CAN THE LEFT OFFER AN ALTERNATIVE?

THERE IS a huge crisis of representation.

One of the things I saw on the NEC over and over again was New Labour suggesting that poor election results were not poor election results and dismissing the loss of the Labour core vote.

The loss of Sheffield council and the results in Scotland and Wales two years ago show a proportion of core Labour

voters are either staying away or voting for parties that are not the Labour Party and not the Tories.

New Labour refuses to address those voters' concerns. That's why you have this bizarre situation of a majority of public opinion in favour of renationalisation of the railways and against privatisation, but New Labour has the opposite policies.

New Labour is supposed to be the creature of focus groups and public opinion. But in reality it is very ideological and committed to Thatcherite ideas. It will keep going with that agenda.

I think the Socialist Alliance is a very positive development.

Of course it is very early days.

But I have been impressed by the number of independent socialists who are not members of particular parties or groupings who are getting involved in the Socialist Alliance.

I believe it is offering a positive agenda for the disaffected core Labour voters and for socialists.

It's not the only show in town, and it is important that all the different groups locally and nationally can work together.

LIZ DAVIES speaking at a Leeds Socialist Alliance meeting on Friday of last week. Six years ago New Labour prevented her from being the Labour candidate in Leeds North East

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND TO LABOUR PARTY MEMBERS WHO SUPPORT THE POLICIES OF THE SOCIALIST ALLIANCE BUT SAY YOU HAVE TO STICK WITH LABOUR?

YOU COULD sit here and discuss hypothetically how you should vote in particular constituencies—here is a safe Labour seat with a socialist Labour candidate and I can vote for her.

In cases where you have a Labour seat with a New Labour MP and a Socialist Alliance candidate, then I would be advocating a vote for the Socialist Alliance.

This is most obvious in Hornsey and Wood Green, both because it is important to vote for Louise Christian and because it is practically a referendum on the Asylum Act in that area.



institution which is carrying out policies that you fundamentally oppose if there is no prospect of changing that.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GROWING ANTI-CAPITALIST MOVEMENT?

I THINK Seattle was amazing, and it put the anti-capitalist movement on the map. I was struck at the time that the media started to report anti-capitalist protesters with a straight face.

The movement has appealed to very many young people who were not being energised by formal politics.

It is highlighting brilliantly the stranglehold the multinationals have on our lives. That message is now gelling with popular consciousness and is not confined to the organised left.

The movement is drawing links between the developed

world and the developing world, and that is a basic piece of class politics.

There is a revival of the left after the bitter defeats we have suffered.

I don't think there are any blueprints as to how that will develop. To a certain extent we have to suck it and see.

I am looking forward to a positive vote for the Socialist Alliance and the left. At the same time the anti-capitalist movement is drawing people in and asking a series of fundamental questions.

Socialists can be an important part of that, and can learn from some of the other forces that are involved in it as well.

I have always believed in a combination of socialists standing in elections, putting themselves forward as socialists, and extra-parliamentary mobilisation.

We are at a stage where that dynamic combination can again make a major impact on politics.

Picture: PAUL HERRMANN/reportdigital.co.uk



what socialists say

Why they're afraid of Tommy Sheridan and the drugs debate

POLITICIANS from the mainstream parties in Scotland are collaborating in a hypocritical and cynical campaign which they claim is about drug use.

In reality it is an attempt to cover their own failings with other people's suffering.

And it is turning into a dangerous witch-hunt of anyone putting forward a rational approach to drugs, in particular socialist member of the Scottish Parliament Tommy Sheridan.

The Blair-supporting *Daily Record* ran a filthy front page attacking Sheridan last week. Tory, Liberal Democrat, New Labour and Scottish National Party politicians all denounced him.

Sheridan's "crime" is to put forward arguments backed by the doctors' British Medical Association, several senior police officers, a number of bishops, the ultra-respectable Police Foundation, and every major organisation that deals with drug use.

He said in parliament that cannabis use should not be lumped together with heroin, and should be legalised.

Other MPs and the *Record* spewed out abuse, but none of them could answer Sheridan's point. That's not surprising. The facts supporting him are overwhelming.

● **Cannabis is not a dangerous drug.**

The British Medical Association says, "The acute toxicity of cannabinoids [cannabis] is extremely low. They are very safe drugs and no deaths have been directly attributed to their recreational or therapeutic use."

● **Legalising cannabis does not lead to people using other drugs.**

Cannabis is legal in Holland. But, says the Police Foundation, "drug-related deaths per million population [in Holland] are the lowest in Europe. In 1995 the figure was 2.4 as against 31.1 for the United Kingdom."

The average age of heroin users in Holland is rising. In Scotland it is falling.

But the British government spends 62 percent of its drugs budget on arresting and enforcing the law, mainly against cannabis users.

It spends just 13 percent on treatment for those who are addicted to hard drugs.

Under this government, 80,000 people were convicted in 1999 for possession of cannabis. That is about three quarters of all drug convictions.

● **Two legal drugs kill far more people than all illegal drugs put together.**

Alcohol-related diseases kill 30,000 people in Britain every year. Drink is the most common factor in all violent incidents.

Tobacco kills 120,000 a year.

Prohibiting alcohol in the US in the 1920s did not stop people drinking. Instead it created a black market which transformed the Mafia from neighbourhood racketeers into giant crime syndicates.

The same is true of the government's blanket policy of prohibition over drugs.

● **Even many establishment figures know the policy of punishing users is not working.**

"We increasingly incline to the view that the banning of all drugs causes more harm than good."

"Despite this paper's instinctive reservations over a more relaxed approach to drugs, we believe that the issue deserves mature and rational national debate."

"The sizeable community who use soft drugs recreationally...want a change in the law which reflects what is happening at social gatherings...every night of the week."

"It is dismal that this reality...carries no weight with the government and its disappointing drugs tsar."

The quotes are from March 1999. The first is from the *Daily Telegraph*, the second from the *Daily Mail*, and the third from *Police Review*, the police's in-house journal.

The bishop of Edinburgh and John Orr, chief constable of Strathclyde, are among the establishment figures calling for liberalisation of drug laws.

So why is the *Record* slamming Sheridan?

Part of it is to boost circulation with its sensationalist campaign to "shop a dealer".

It is also using fake concern for working class people to undermine a left wing challenge to New Labour.

Tears

If the *Record* really cared it would not be favourably quoting MSP Bill Aitken.

This Tory dared to spout "concern" for families "with three generations" addicted to hard drugs such as heroin.

Each of those generations suffered at the hands of Margaret Thatcher and John Major. Problem drug use in Scotland rocketed in the 1980s under Thatcher's policy of mass unemployment.

People are continuing to suffer under New Labour, with a record gap between rich and poor, run down services, and five million people in Britain living in UN-defined absolute poverty.

But there is no march against poverty from the *Record*, no front pages slamming politicians for abandoning working class people.

Instead we get hysterical attacks on what is accurate medical opinion, and a bandwagon for cowardly politicians whose pro-business policies create the very drugs problem they shed synthetic tears over.

by KEVIN OVENDEN

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Your questions answered

Stocks, shares, boom or bust

“MAYHEM IN the market.” “Bloodbath.”
That was how the *Daily Mail* and *Mirror* described recent falls in the stock markets that started in the US, and spread to Britain and other countries.
Share prices fell, wiping billions off their value.
A freefall on the stock market doesn’t just hit the City dealers.
It can hurt workers’ pension funds, which are invested in the stock exchange. Companies can try to recover some of their value by cutting jobs and closing factories.
Commentators are worried that the underlying problems in the world’s leading economies, the US and Japan, mean there is more turmoil to come.
Socialist Worker explains what the stock markets are, why they go into crisis, and argues the root cause is how economies are organised under capitalism.

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WHAT IS the stock market?
THE STOCK market is a giant gambling den that the rich dominate.

Traders hope to make huge amounts of money by buying stocks at one price and selling them for a higher price.
During a boom speculators feel their gamble can only pay off. As more people invest, the share prices go higher.
This fuels the boom even further as investors don’t want to miss out on making “easy money” on a “sure-fire bet”.
In the US many middle class households invested money in stocks.
They gained as the share prices rose, encouraging them to spend their extra money on household goods and services.
Companies increased their production to meet the demand. Some commentators argued that the boom in the US could go on forever. The same arguments were made in Britain about the dot.com companies and mobile phone companies.
The shares in this “new economy” rose massively, as traders believed high-tech firms were more dynamic than the old companies and demand for their products was not going to fall.

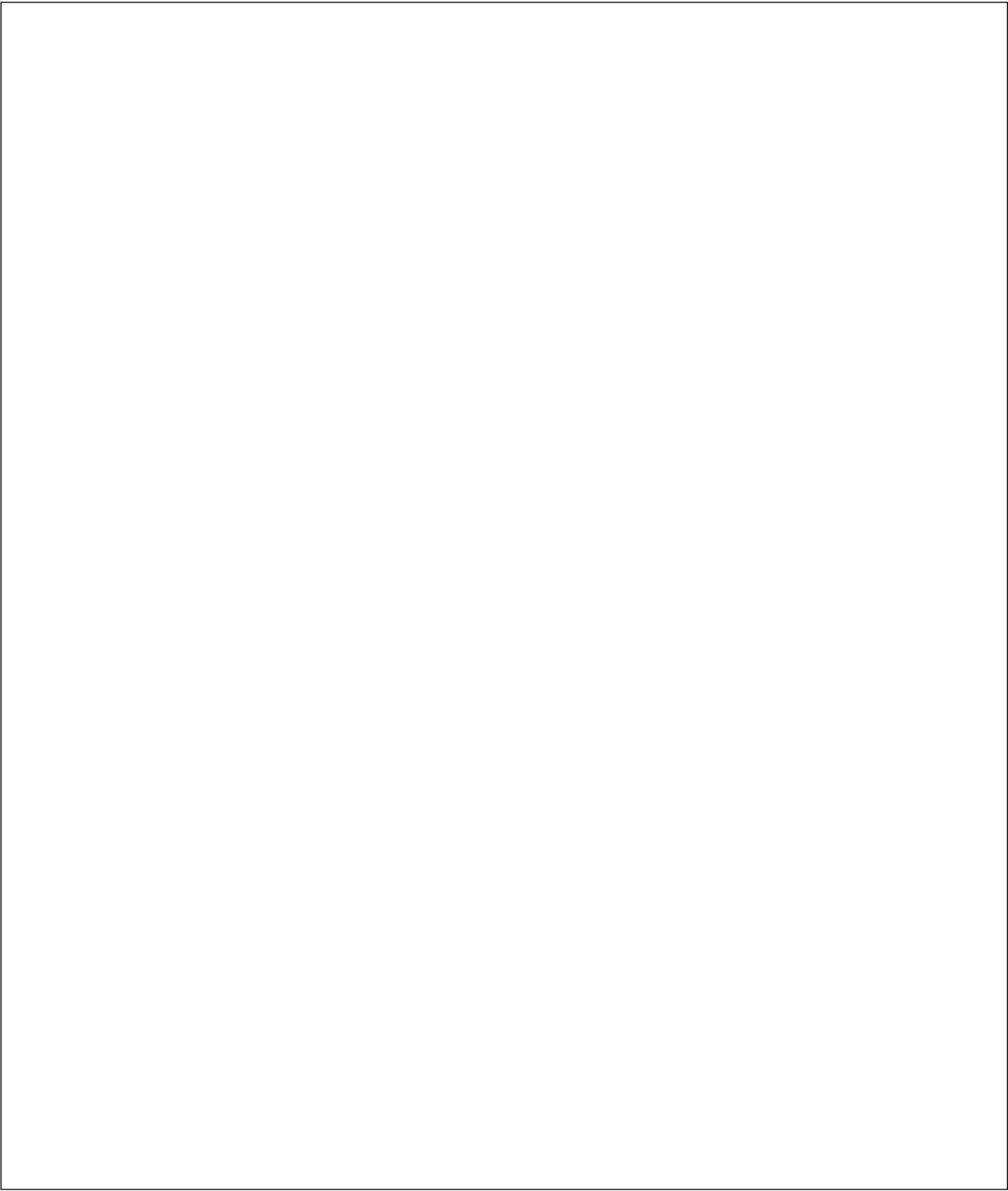
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WHAT WENT wrong?
THE STOCK market may seem to have a life of its own, separate from the daily production of goods and services inside factories and businesses.
But the stock market cannot escape from fundamental problems at the heart of the economy.
A boom means firms rush to make as much profit as possible. Each is fighting for their product to be bought as opposed to their rivals’. Intense competition means some firms go bust.
Workers are thrown on the dole and

factories close, leaving workers with less money to buy the goods that pile up unsold.
Suddenly companies which have pushed workers to increase production claim there is “overcapacity”. Leading firms scale back production.
This happened with the “new economy” companies.
Ericsson, the third biggest mobile phone maker, announced recently it was likely to make a loss, not break even as it had assured investors.
Vodafone, the leading mobile phone company, admits it overestimated how many people would want to buy a phone by up to 10 percent.
Motorola, the second biggest mobile phone maker, plans to axe 7,000 jobs, and Cable and Wireless is cutting 4,000 jobs to save money.
These companies had helped to fuel the “bubble” of speculation on the stock market, and they then helped to burst that bubble.
Panic replaced the old confidence on the stock market and became just as infectious. Traders wanted to sell their shares for the security of hard cash, and the small investors who couldn’t do so fast enough lost money.
Crisis on the stock market can exacerbate existing economic problems.
The US economy has been slowing down recently after years of expansion.
Industrial production has not grown since September. Figures show unsold goods are piling up in US warehouses.
The US is the biggest economy in the world. It plays a key role in the global market. If it suffers an economic crisis, it will affect countries in the West, and have a massive impact on Third World and Latin American countries.

\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$

WHAT IS the role of Japan in the crisis?
IN THE 1980s Japan’s economy was promoted as a model for others to follow.



WALL STREET trader panicked by stock market fall

It seemed to prove the market economy could work. There was low unemployment and the economy grew massively by selling highly profitable goods around the world.
Banks lent heavily to finance companies’ expansion and the government promoted such investment.
There was a huge boom in real estate, with new buildings on prime urban sites selling for ridiculously high prices. At the boom’s height in 1987 the value of property on these sites was worth 20 percent more than Japan’s gross national product for that whole year.
But in 1990 the bubble burst in the world’s second largest economy.
The banks faced massive loans that companies weren’t paying off. The bad debt went alongside stockpiles of goods that companies couldn’t sell.
Japan has been in recession ever since. Workers have had their lives turned upside down. “Secure” jobs have been axed or put under threat.
The Japanese government has tried many measures to tackle the problem.
It has pumped money into public works schemes to try to stimulate the economy. It has cut interest rates to nothing to try to encourage people to borrow money and then spend it.
But it has not succeeded. Unemployment is higher than in the US. Real wages have fallen four times in the last five years.
Many people have no confidence that the government has a strategy that can get them out of the crisis.
The prime minister, Yoshiro Mori, has an approval rating in Japan of just 6 percent.
The Japanese and US economies are tied together. Japanese banks have lent heavily to the US, and the US sucks in many Japanese exports.
If the economic crisis gets worse in one of the two most powerful economies

in the world, it will pull the other down with it.

EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

HOW SERIOUS is the crisis?
IT IS not possible to say at this moment whether the current economic problems will turn into a catastrophe.
But one thing is sure—capitalism is prone to booms and slumps, and the question is when, not if, the next one is coming.
Karl Marx identified this in his writings over 150 years ago.
He argued that speculators are supremely confident profits will increase until they realise a slump has hit them.
“Business always appears thoroughly sound until suddenly the debacle takes place,” he said.
Or, as the pro-market *Economist* put it last week, “like all good cartoon characters, the world’s biggest technology companies kept running obliviously in mid-air long after the economic ground fell away beneath them.”
That is why it is dangerous nonsense for the chancellor, Gordon Brown, to claim New Labour’s economic policies brought about “the end of boom and bust”.
A slump devastates workers’ lives—they are chucked on the dole with little prospect of finding another job. Any savings they have can be wiped out.
Many smaller businesses go bust and are gobbled up by the few big players that survive, increasing the power of multinational companies.
Not every jitter on the stock market translates into a slump. But sharp falls in share prices can be an expression of deeper problems in the economy.
Some commentators today fear there could be a return to the great slump of the 1930s.

This was a key turning point in history. People responded to the devastating economic crisis by looking for alternatives on both the far left and the far right.

What is the socialist alternative?

EVERY TIME there is an economic crisis the bosses want to make us pay for their mess.
Steel company Corus is already trying to cut 6,000 jobs and close factories.
Bosses are putting pressure on workers everywhere to work longer hours, increase productivity and hold back demands for a decent pay rise.
They will step this up if the stock market falls continue and a recession hits. This is the reality of the free market that New Labour worships.
Socialists argue there is an alternative. Some 200 multinationals control a quarter of the world’s output.
They are run in competition with each other for the profit of a handful of billionaires.
If the workers in these multinationals took over control of these factories then we could have production for need and economic crisis would not occur.
This would be the socialist alternative to capitalism that puts people’s needs before profit, and stops the rich forcing poor people across the world to pick up the debt for their stock market gambling.

in my view

Going Manic in Havana

MANIC STREET Preachers launched their new album, *Know Your Enemy*, at the Karl Marx Stadium in Havana, Cuba, before starting their current tour.

Fidel Castro, Cuba's leader since 1959, joined the audience of 5,000. The Manics described him as "like the biggest rock star you could ever meet".

There's a bit of a love affair going on between pop music and Cuba. First the Buena Vista Social Club relaunched a group of elderly Cuban musicians barely known outside the island—and their CD hit platinum practically overnight.

So why did the Manics go to Havana? Maybe the answer's in the song "Baby Elian" on the new album: "Offer the world a dream/Dress it up—it's blackmail.../You cannot buy a nation/Not even the Miami mob."

The anger against the US has been there in the lyrics of Manics songs for years—in "ifwhiteamericatoldthetruthforoneday..." from their 1994 album *The Holy Bible*, for example, or in the moving "Let Robeson Sing" on the new album.

Since Cuba has been the target for the hatred of the US right since the 1959 revolution, it's logical that the Manics should identify with a small island fighting off the giant.

But the Cuban government would have quickly banned the brash, anarchic and often cynical songs of the Manics. When Cuban young people got into heavy metal in the 1980s, the Castro government came down hard on what it saw as a negative musical movement.

Stay Beautiful

The Havana stadium audience was not typical of a Manics gig. Most young people in Cuba had no possibility of getting near the concert. It had a carefully selected audience, and only people with dollars can go to these events.

When the Manics sing, "Deny your culture of consumption/This is the culture of destruction" on the track "Stay Beautiful", they're right. Cuba seemed to stand against the trend, to be a country that had avoided exploitation and inequality—an island of socialism surrounded by enemies.

Until 1986 Cuba stayed afloat by tying itself in to the Soviet bloc. But it didn't bring the freedom and independence most Cubans had hoped for after 1959, although they had a good health service and real educational opportunities. They had exchanged one master for another.

When Eastern Europe collapsed Cuba had to look for new sources of foreign currency—and the answer was tourism. Cuba was beautiful, warm, and the birthplace of some of the world's most sensuous music.

Yet there was very little democracy. The "rock star" Castro had held power for 40 years with a tiny group around him, political opposition was not tolerated, and people with AIDS were persecuted and jailed. There was widespread discontent and frustration but nowhere to express it.

When the Manics said, "Cuba is opening its doors more and more to Western culture" they were only partly right. Cuba needs tourists, especially the young, to come and spend their foreign currency.

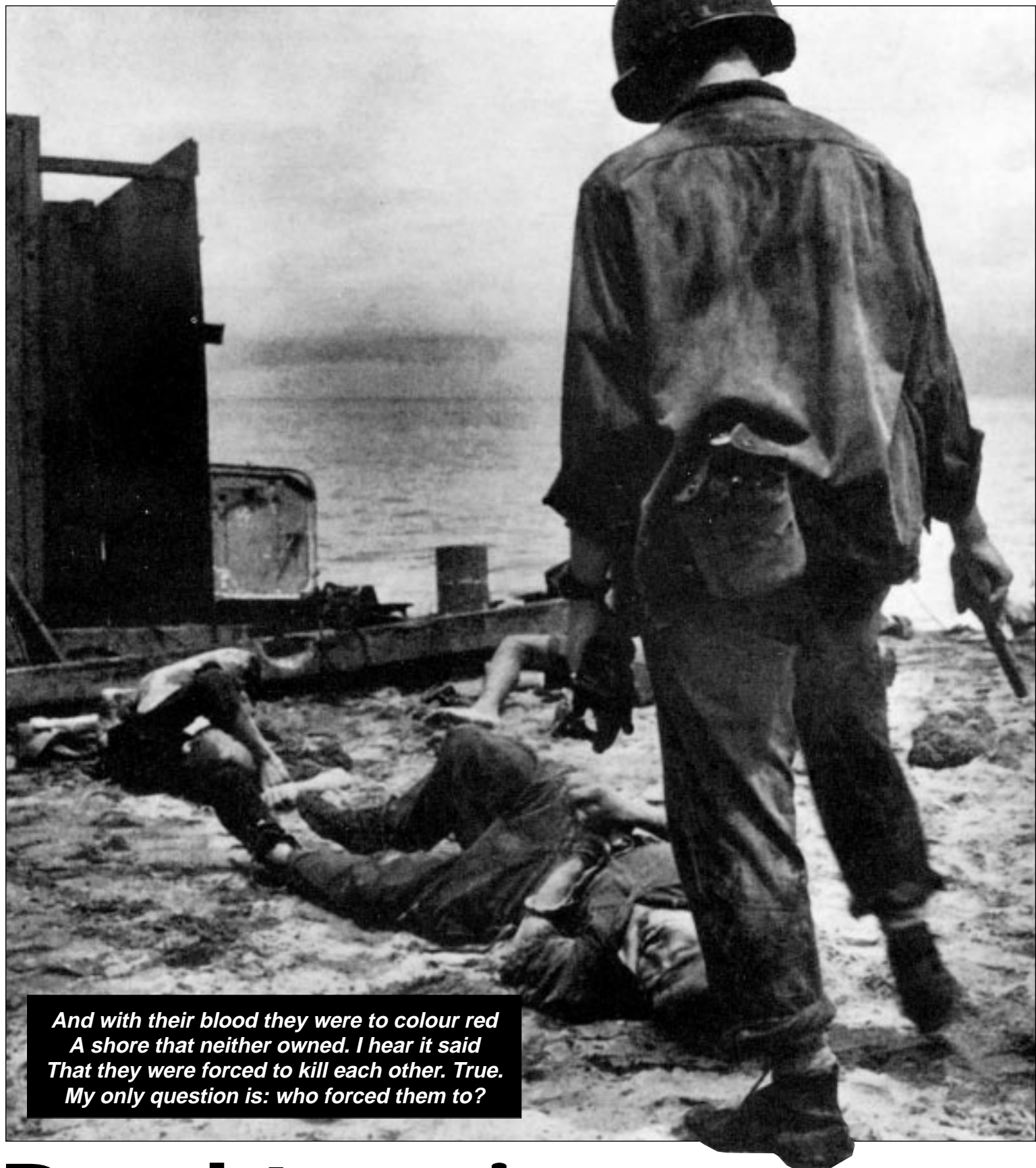
The Manics also said, "Unless you get involved on a community level, things are just going to disintegrate." In Cuba the possibilities for independent community organisation and protest are virtually nil—everything is controlled from above.

It is ironic that the Cuban government should use the Manics as its ambassadors to the world. This group of musicians has so often given voice to the anger at the system, and the suspicion of political leaders and consumer culture that Cuban youth can never publicly express.

Remember the final lines of "Baby Elian": "You don't just sit in a rocking chair/When you've built a revolution."

by MIKE GONZALEZ

book



*And with their blood they were to colour red
A shore that neither owned. I hear it said
That they were forced to kill each other. True.
My only question is: who forced them to?*

Brecht's prime reasons to oppose war machine

DON'T LET anyone tell you great art cannot be political or popular.

Bertolt Brecht was a German socialist playwright and poet whose work was popular and challenging.

He tried to shock people out of complacency by putting together unexpected ideas and images, making people think more deeply about the world around them.

Brecht wrote his first play, *Baal*, in 1918, just after the First World War.

His early plays are full of cynicism and despair. But the revolutionary wave that spread across Europe after the war convinced him that it was worth fighting the system that created such misery.

His studies of Marxism in the 1920s convinced him it was possible to understand the madness of capitalism.

He wrote a string of popular political plays through the 1930s and 1940s, including *The Threepenny Opera*, *Mother Courage and Life of Gallileo*.

He didn't want his audience to

by CHRIS NINEHAM

identify with his characters, but to think and even debate about the choices they faced.

Sometimes arguments broke out in the theatre. At the opening of *The City of Mahagonny* there was hand to hand fighting in the stalls.

Brecht worked closely with the German Communist Party in the early 1930s, and his plays attracted a large working class audience.

Closely

He had to flee Germany in 1933 to avoid arrest by the Nazis.

He stayed in Europe for a while and then went to Hollywood in search of work. The studios rejected all but one of the 15 scripts he offered them.

Brecht returned to East Germany after the war. He was critical of the Stalinist regime there.

He called Stalin "The Honoured Murderer of the People" in an unpublished poem.

But he stayed because he was offered more artistic freedom there

than he had had in the West. Brecht is an awkward figure for the art establishment, a world respected artist with a clear political commitment.

The newly published *War Primer* is a great example of his work.

It was mostly put together while he was a refugee from Nazi Germany.

Each page combines a war photograph from the international press with a four-line poem. Brecht shows the madness and the horror of war, but he does much more than that.

The primer tries to show who's responsible and who benefits.

Under a picture of a mother looking for her family in her bombed out house he writes:

*Stop searching, woman: you
will never find them
But, woman, don't accept that
Fate is to blame.
Those murky forces, woman,
that torment you
Have each of them a face,
address and name.*

The *War Primer* makes you think afresh about war and the way it is presented in the media. Above all

the book aims to "turn pity into red rage".

War Primer, Bertolt Brecht, Libris, £19.95, available from Bookmarks, 1 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1B 3QE. Phone 020 7637 1848 or buy online at www.bookmarks.uk.com

preview

WALK ON BY: THE STORY OF POPULAR SONG (Sat, 8.15pm, BBC2) looks this week at the roots of rock and roll in the American Deep South.

SERPICO (Sat, 12.10am, BBC2). Al Pacino uncovers police corruption in this enjoyable film.

SECRETS AND LIES (Sun, 10pm, C4). Mike Leigh's excellent film about adoption, race and the family.

MURDER IN THE FIRST (Sun, 11pm, BBC1). Good film based on the true story of the brutal regime in Alcatraz prison.

VICTORIANS UNCOVERED: SEX AND THE EMPIRE (Tues, 9pm, C4) could be an interesting look at racial and sexual divisions under British rule in India.

where
we
stand

INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS ACTION

The workers create all the wealth under capitalism. A new society can only be constructed when they collectively seize control of that wealth and plan its production and distribution.

REVOLUTION NOT REFORM

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed as the established Labour and trade union leaders say. It has to be overthrown.

THERE IS NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD

The structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class.

They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against the workers.

The working class needs an entirely different kind of state—a workers' state based upon councils of workers' delegates and a workers' militia.

At most parliamentary activity can be used to make propaganda against the present system.

Only the mass action of the workers themselves can destroy the system.

INTERNATIONALISM

The struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle.

We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries.

We oppose everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries.

We oppose racism and imperialism. We oppose all immigration controls. We support the right of black people and other oppressed groups to organise their own defence.

We support all genuine national liberation movements.

The experience of Russia demonstrates that a socialist revolution cannot survive in isolation in one country. In Russia the result was state capitalism, not socialism.

In Eastern Europe and China a similar system was later established by Stalinist parties.

We support the struggle of workers in these countries against both private and state capitalism.

We are for real social, economic and political equality of women.

We are for an end to all forms of discrimination against lesbians and gays.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To achieve socialism the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party. Such a party can only be built by activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests.

We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions.

We urge all those who agree with our policies to join with us in the struggle to build the revolutionary party.

SOCIALIST WORKER NEWS

Paper knits the strands together

"I HAVE copies of *Socialist Worker* on me all the time," says Peter Leech, Socialist Alliance prospective parliamentary candidate for Ipswich.

"Wherever I go there are people who are interested in taking the paper.

"If I have a political discussion with someone over a coffee or something, offering the paper comes naturally. I simply point out an article and say, 'Reading this can explain the issues.'

"I sell four regularly at a community centre where the local TGWU union branch also happens to meet.

"Two buyers are in the Labour Party. A third is the TGWU branch secretary.

"I also volunteer at a centre run by the Refugee Council. There are now two regular buyers there and

sometimes more.

"People are interested in a range of issues. One woman asked to get the paper because she had been talking to her neighbour, a post office worker, who gets it weekly."

Peter has been part of many campaigns in Ipswich over the years.

He says, "There is really a sense of more people becoming active now. The Socialist Alliance is focusing that.

"It is not just the sheer number of things people are organising around. It is how deeply people are questioning what is going on in Britain and internationally.

"People want to take *Socialist Worker* for the same reasons I do. We are confronted by a blizzard of trivial information in the media.

"*Socialist Worker* offers an incisive socialist take on what is happening. And, of course, there are the reports of people organising resistance which you would never hear about unless you got the paper.

"People on the coach down to the defend asylum seekers rally in London last Saturday bought the paper. Many of them want to get it regularly. You can see how sales of *Socialist Worker* can help knit together the strands of the movement."



VOTE SOCIALIST

Back this campaign



SOCIALIST candidates will be standing in constituencies across England, Scotland and Wales at the general election. Some of those where a decision to stand has already been taken are listed here, along with candidates where they have already been selected. In some areas candidates are being selected in the coming week and decisions are being taken on whether to stand. Everyone who can should get involved in the fight to make sure the socialist message comes over loud and clear in the election.

ALDRIDGE-BROWNHILLS

John Rothery

ASHFIELD

George Watson

BARNSELY CENTRAL

Henry Rajch

BIRMINGHAM ERDINGTON



Steve Godward

BIRMINGHAM NORTHFIELD

Clive Walder

BIRMINGHAM PERRY BARR

Caroline Johnson

BLACKBURN

BOOTLE

Pete Glover

BRADFORD SOUTH

Ateeq Siddique

BRENTFORD AND ISLEWORTH

Danny Faith

BRENT SOUTH

Mick McDonnell

BRISTOL EAST

Andy Pryor

BRISTOL SOUTH

Brian Drummond

CAMBRIDGE

Howard Senter

CARDIFF CENTRAL

Julian Goss

CARDIFF SOUTH AND PENARTH

Dave Bartlett

CARLISLE

Paul Wilcox

CHESTERFIELD

Jeannie Robinson

COVENTRY NORTH EAST

Dave Nellist

COVENTRY SOUTH

Rob Windsor

CRAWLEY

Muriel Hirsch

DAGENHAM

Berlyne Hamilton

DARLINGTON

Alan Docherty

DONCASTER CENTRAL

Janet Terry

DUDLEY SOUTH

Angela Thompson

EALING, ACTON AND SHEPHERD'S BUSH

Nick Grant

EDMONTON

Howard Medwell

EXETER

Fran Choules

GREENWICH AND WOOLWICH

Kirstie Paton

GILLINGHAM

Wynford Vaughn

HACKNEY SOUTH AND SHOREDITCH

Cecilia Prosper

HOLBORN AND ST PANCRAS

Candy Udwin

HORNSEY AND WOOD GREEN

Louise Christian

HOVE

Andy Richards

HUDDERSFIELD CENTRAL

Graham Hellawell

HULL NORTH



Roger Smith

IPSWICH

Peter Leech

ISLINGTON SOUTH

Janine Booth

LEEDS CENTRAL

Steve Johnston

LEICESTER WEST

Steve Score

LEWISHAM AND DEPTFORD

Ian Page

LEWISHAM EAST

Jean Kysow

LEYTON AND WANSTEAD

Sally Labern

LIVERPOOL RIVERSIDE

Cathy Wilson

LIVERPOOL WAVERTREE

Mark O'Brien

LUTON SOUTH

Joe Hearne

MAKERFIELD

MANCHESTER BLACKLEY

Karen Reissmann

MANCHESTER WITHINGTON

John Clegg

MIDDLESBROUGH

Geoff Kerr Morgan

NORWICH SOUTH

Dave Manningham

NOTTINGHAM EAST

Pete Radcliff

OXFORD EAST

John Lister

PECKHAM AND CAMBERWELL

John Mulrenan

PLYMOUTH DEVONPORT

Tony Staunton

PONTEFRAC T AND CASTLEFORD

John Gill

POPLAR AND CANNING TOWN

Kambiz Boomla

PORTSMOUTH SOUTH

John Molyneux

REGENTS PARK AND NORTH KENSINGTON

China Miéville

ROTHERHAM

Peter Grant

SALFORD

Brian Wilson

SHEFFIELD BRIGHTSIDE

Nick Riley

SHEFFIELD CENTRAL

Nick Riley

SOUTHAMPTON ITCHEN

Gavin Marsh

SOUTHAMPTON TEST

Mark Abel

STREATHAM

Greg Tucker

STEVENAGE

Steve Glennon

STOCKTON SOUTH

Lawrie Coombes

SWANSEA WEST

Alec Thraves

TELFORD

Mike Jeffries

TORFAEN

Steve Bell

TOTTENHAM

Weyman Bennett

TYNEBRIDGE

Terry Rodgers

TYNESIDE NORTH

Pete Burnett

VAUXHALL



Theresa Bennett

WAKEFIELD

Mick Griffiths

WALSALL NORTH

Dave Church

WALSALL SOUTH

Peter Smith

WATFORD

Jon Berry

WAVENEY

Rupert Mallin

WIGAN

Dave Lowe

YORK

To get involved phone
the National Network
of Socialist Alliances
on 020 7536 9696

The Scottish Socialist Party
plans to stand in all 72
constituencies in Scotland.
Get involved—
phone 0141 221 7714

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

To join the Socialist Workers Party,
fill in this form and send it to:
PO Box 82, London E3 3LH

Name

Address

.....

.....

Trade union..... Phone

E-mail



Fax 020 7538 0140

E-mail letters@socialistworker.co.uk

or send to

letters

PO Box 82 London E3 3LH

SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

We're on the map!

A LABOUR Party public meeting last week for south London's North Southwark and Bermondsey constituency was fascinating.

Speakers like Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn and Trevor Phillips were there to try to boost Labour's campaign to win the seat back from Liberal Democrat MP Simon Hughes.

The first person to put their hand up said he had been a member of the Labour Party for 20 years and was a former trade union convenor, but that he would rather cut off his right arm than campaign for what the party has become today.

The second person, also a member for 20 years, said there used to be a time when you could assume a Labour candidate would be against privatisation, but given this was no longer the case he wanted to know where the candidate stood

on privatisation.

He said he would vote for Labour in Bermondsey but would back John Mulrenan, the Socialist Alliance candidate in Peckham.

A third speaker, defending Labour, admitted straight away that "we have to recognise a lot of people feel like this—that is, dejected and betrayed by New Labour."

Annoyed

Trevor Phillips got very annoyed, said he was sick of people "bleating on about betrayal", and attacked the Socialist Alliance—by name—for splitting the vote in the Camden and Barnet seat in last year's Greater London Assembly elections.

The next person—to hearty applause—responded to Phillips by saying he had always thought that it was a democratic right to decide who you



AROUND 200 people attended a Socialist Alliance rally in north London last week

voted for.

At one point, when the chair demanded to know if people thought Tony Blair was a good prime minister, people shouted back, "No!"

Whether to vote Labour or Socialist Alliance dominated the whole meeting, even

though only one speaker from the floor was actually from the Alliance.

The Labour candidate for Bermondsey said during his speech that he was the man to take back Bermondsey from the Liberals, even though "some say that is only because

the Socialist Alliance is not standing a candidate".

It showed me how deep the disaffection is inside the Labour Party, and just how much the Socialist Alliance is on the map!

□LEE BILLINGHAM, South London

SEE YOU IN GENOA Watch your glasses

BETWEEN 15 and 17 March the OECD, World Bank and International Monetary Fund came to Naples in Italy to talk about "e-government", or how selling the internet and computers can supposedly make us and the Third World richer and more democratic.

They expected opposition, but not as many as the 20,000 who mobilised to show opposition to their Global Forum.

The demonstrators were mainly from the city itself and the Campania region.

The organisers of the protest were themselves surprised by the turnout.

It shows that a growing

MARCHING IN Naples two weeks ago

number, despite the pessimism of those who lead the movement, are no longer content to delegate their political will to the centre-left (like Blair) which is in government.

The police riot let loose at the end of the demonstration (with the excuse of "responding" to small groups of anarchists) was intended to terrorise the demonstrators into not going to protest against the G8 in Genoa in July.

But it risks seriously rebounding on the forces of "law and order".

Thousands of people who demonstrated for the first time in their lives saw that our state is not democratic, and that if you want to change society you have to do it yourself. See you in Genoa!

□PHIL RUSHTON, Comunismo dal Basso, Italy

Shame

WHERE SHOULD Cabinet Office minister Graham Stringer pick to preach the benefits of e-democracy but in a Global Forum guarded by 6,000 police and besieged by 20,000 anti-capitalist protesters?

The former left wing leader of Manchester council jetted off to attend the third Global Forum in Naples on the theme of "Fostering Democracy and Development Through E-Government".

Stringer found the conference in the Palazzo Reale obscured by teargas and surrounded by protesters. Undeterred, Stringer addressed the conference, unaware of the irony that while he was making a special plea that those in power "must open up new democratic channels through which government can relate to its citizens", the Italian riot police were at that moment giving their own citizens a good battering.

So much for la dolce vita!
□HASSAN MAHAMDALLIE, North London

BEING LONG term unemployed, I was referred to a training college by the Benefits Agency.

The jobs advisory office displays a notice highlighting the importance of appearance.

It points out that recently a supermarket check-out worker was sent home to shave her legs.

In another case a woman was sacked because her employers felt her glasses made her look unappealing.

Others have lost their jobs for being too quiet, too fat and even too "ugly".

Unsurprisingly, most of these cases involve women staff.

Employers, it states, are also analysing the "vocal tones" of job applicants.

Apparently they prefer employees with soft speaking voices to guttural ones.

Richard Reeves, spokesman for the Industrial Society, says it is "only natural for companies to place

increasing importance on appearance".

Perhaps then, as part of its raising standards in education, the government would be better off introducing new subjects to the

National Curriculum such as make-up, fashion, slimming, elocution and regular visits to the optician—for girls only, of course.

□KEITH PRINCE, East London

Kick in the teeth

I HAVE just seen another disgusting attack on disabled people in community care.

A high court judge has ruled that Disability Living Allowance can be treated as income when calculating rent.

The judge rejected a claim by a disabled mother and her daughter that the care component (as opposed to the mobility component) of their Disability Living Allowance should be disregarded as income, and so could not be used to make up rent.

Disabled people may lose up to £50 a week in benefits because of this decision. It is a scandal, because people with disabilities use their Disability Living Allowance to pay for the care they receive from social services.

□MARTIN MURRAY, North London

postal points

■PARLIAMENTARY politics and global trade have been dealt a serious blow by the foot and mouth saga.

The timing of the general election is now a major trauma for Blair and Co.

However, this is not the only problem for the government. From the tube to trains to education and the economy, it is clearer than ever that the system does not work.

The lack of control we have over this system is especially hideous.

How dare our rulers be so contemptuous of our lives?

It seems blatantly obvious that our health, our livelihood, and even our very existence are secondary concerns for big companies.

Socialists have every reason to go on the offensive against this out of control system.

□GEORGIA SUMNER, North London

■IAN WILSON indicates *Socialist Worker* is being unclear in its advice on how to vote at the general election (Letters, 17 March).

Actually, the SWP advocates those in constituencies where there is no socialist candidate to cast

CHRISTOPHER Alder was unlawfully killed three years ago, on 1 April 1998, in Queens Gardens police station, Hull.

That was the unanimous verdict of the inquest jury last August.

Five police officers have been charged in connection with the death.

Between them they refused to answer 150 questions at the inquest.

Now the police are trying to overturn the unlawful killing verdict by going to the High Court for a judicial review.

This is outrageous. It proves that black families still have to fight every inch for truth and justice in Jack Straw and Tony Blair's Britain.

The Justice for Christopher Alder campaign is calling for solidarity from every activist in London. Come and show your support by joining the protest outside the High Court in the Strand from 9am onwards on Wednesday 4 April.

□JANET ALDER, Justice for Christopher Alder campaign

NHS pain

I WOULD like to draw your attention to my recent experiences with the NHS here in Tower Hamlets in east London.

I visited my GP because of severe arthritic pain in my knee. He gave me a letter saying I needed X-rays at Mile End Hospital. I duly attended with a view to making an appointment to see a specialist.

I was told at the hospital that they would write to me to fix a date.

I heard nothing, so I rang them, only to be told that I would have to wait a further four months.

I am 73 years of age and I am in constant pain. I cannot be expected to wait all this time simply to see a doctor.

For me it is like a prison sentence with no possibility of remission.

All the extra funding for the NHS means nothing if people like me, and so many others, cannot get effective treatment within a reasonable period of time.

It is one reason why so many Labour voters are dissatisfied with the Blair government.

□TEDDY JACKS, East London

their vote for Labour.

The material gulf between the so called "elite" and the poor is wider now than any period since records began. In these circumstances it is hard to see how socialists could suggest that workers vote Labour.

Society's toilers deserve better than the ragbag of pro-capitalist options currently on offer.

□DAVE COLLINS, Huddersfield

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Socialist election campaigns

Sheffield gets the message

ONE OF the best meetings in the city for years gave a real boost to the Socialist Alliance election campaign in Sheffield last week.

Over 160 people crammed into the hall to hear PCS civil servants' union general secretary elect Mark Serwotka and Hilary Wainwright, editor of the left wing *Red Pepper* magazine, back the Socialist Alliance campaign.

They were joined on the platform by Brian Wilson and Nick Riley.

Nick, a steel worker, is standing for the Socialist Alliance in Sheffield Central constituency.

Brian, a local housing campaigner, is standing in Sheffield Brightside constituency against New Labour education secretary David Blunkett.

"It was a really impressive meeting," said Jo, who has been helping organise

the Socialist Alliance campaign in the city.

"About one third of the people there I'd never seen before. Most people who came put their names down to help out, and we collected hundreds of pounds that evening."

The meeting has been followed by a busy schedule of campaigning in the city.

The next day some 25 Socialist Alliance supporters joined a protest over the government's benefit "cheat" line outside the city's Benefits Agency.

They were also furious that candidate Brian Wilson, who is disabled, has been hauled in by the agency for an interview over the benefits he receives—because he was part of a protest over housing!

Both Brian and Nick were set to be busy this Wednesday and Thursday as they were to escort visiting Dudley NHS strikers around workplaces across Sheffield urging solidarity with their

fight against PFI privatisation.

And this Friday a protest was also due outside a visit by David Blunkett to Sheffield College. Then on Saturday Socialist Alliance supporters were to join Globalise Resistance activists for another protest outside the city centre Gap store over sweatshop labour.

As well as these kind of activities, "leafleting of wards is well under way as well", says Jo. "In just one ward over 26 local people have been involved in delivering leaflets. That shows the kind of broad network we can build."

SEND US reports of your local Socialist Alliance or Scottish Socialist Party election campaign.

Contact Hazel Croft on 020 7538 0828, or e-mail Hazel at reports@socialistworker.co.uk

NEW SOCIALIST ALLIANCE POSTERS

Cut hours, not jobs



THE National Network of Socialist Alliances has produced 15 excellent new posters detailing the pledges of the Socialist Alliance.

The posters come in packs of 80. Each pack costs £8. To order phone 020 7536 9696.

Councils

Plymouth on march again

SOME 300 people braved icy wind and rain to mount a noisy demonstration against council cuts and privatisation in Plymouth last Saturday.

The demo was the latest protest in a series, which has seen strikes by council workers and some of the biggest marches in Plymouth for many years.

Saturday's march was led by an advertising lorry with "Plymouth is not for sale".

Plymouth's Tory council is making major cuts, though it has retreated from some attacks on workers' conditions and their union in the face of the action so far.

A mass meeting of UNISON members in the council last Friday voted

overwhelmingly for an escalation of strike action.

Management have now offered fresh negotiations, and regional union leaders have suspended strike action while talks proceed.

However, the work to rule by 5,400 council workers remains in place and is beginning to bite, with computer systems failing and council tax billing unlikely to meet the 1 April deadline.

●**TONY STAUNTON, Socialist Alliance prospective parliamentary candidate for Plymouth Devonport**

■**Send messages of support to Plymouth UNISON, 13 Windsor Place, The Hoe, Plymouth PL1 2HN. Fax 01752 661 108.**

Westminster



STRIKING HOUSING workers

WORKERS AT Westminster City Council's homeless persons unit are on all-out strike to protect their terms and conditions against a private housing landlord taking over their jobs.

The service is being privatised by the Tory council and will be run by WMS Haywards, a subsidiary of private landlord Erinaceous.

There is a clear conflict of interest in allowing a private landlord to, in effect, run a housing advisory service—and make a profit from it!

The new contractor has refused to give a commit-

ment that it will not issue new contracts with inferior terms and conditions.

One worker with nine years service has already been offered a new contract with 11 days less holiday.

The city council has the ability to ensure WMS Haywards protects conditions. It refuses to do so as it says it would be too costly.

It was, however, prepared to spend thousands of pounds in legal costs trying to stop us from striking. The council took out an injunction in the high court, but this was thrown out on appeal.

●**PASQUALE TESTA**

Hackney

THE CAMPAIGN against cuts in Hackney, east London, was expected to gather pace this week, with three demonstrations planned.

Wigan

WIGAN COUNCIL workers' fight against attacks on their working conditions and an effective 2 percent pay cut took a welcome, if unexpected, turn last week.

The national executive committee of their UNISON union overturned a decision by regional officials.

Those officials had refused to ratify action after a 54 percent yes vote in a ballot. The executive's decision meant a one-day strike was set to take place this Thursday.

Hull

SOME 200 members of UNISON in Hull City Council met last week to discuss £30 million of cuts.

The council wants to push through the closure of old people's homes and the privatisation of other services. The meeting voted unanimously for industrial action.

Protesters were to take to the streets against the closure of the Primrose Elderly Daycare Centre and the Huddleston Centre for disabled people.

Another protest centred on the threatened eviction of an occupation on the site of the former nursery in Atherden Road.

Last week around 70 people came to a meeting, organised by the Fightback anti-cuts campaign, against the closure of the Huddleston Centre.

There is deep anger among people right across the borough at the plans by the Labour-Tory coalition that runs the council.

The pressure is even beginning to tell inside the Labour group.

Several councillors have now declared that they are opposed to the Huddleston Centre closure.

The council workers' UNISON union is considering further strikes against attacks on jobs, conditions and services.

Edinburgh East & Musselburgh

THE SCOTTISH Socialist Party's election campaign in Edinburgh East & Musselburgh got off to a flying start last week with a 60 strong public meeting at Musselburgh's Brunton Hall.

SSP candidate Derek Durkin is a leading member of the CWU postal workers' union in Edinburgh.

Derek spoke about the

way in which Post Office management are trying to prepare the way for more privatisation.

The Scottish Socialist Party's MSP Tommy Sheridan gave an inspiring speech that convinced many people in the hall that building a socialist alternative in Scotland is now on the agenda.

●**PETE CANNELL**

Civil servants

WORKERS IN the Employment Service could soon be taking action.

Management are pushing savage staffing cuts in offices around the country, an attack which has led to calls by activists for their PCS union to organise industrial action.

Those calls have now been boosted by the decision of the executive of the Employment Service section of the union to throw its weight behind them.

If the national executive of the union now gives the go ahead, civil servants across the north west of England will be balloted for a one-day regional strike.

Anti-Nazi

IN OLDHAM the Nazi National Front plans a "Rights for whites" march on Saturday, the same day that a march to defend asylum seekers was planned in Manchester.

If the Nazis thought they could sabotage our demo they are wrong! We have moved our Manchester demonstration to Saturday 7 April.

We are backing the anti-Nazi protesters and supporters to help stop the Nazis, and building the Manchester demonstration, which we now expect to be even bigger, for the week after.

●**MARK KRANTZ**

EIGHTY PROTESTERS assembled for a rally at Tipton Sports Academy in Sandwell, West Midlands, last Saturday morning to protest at the cancellation of the booking for the

Unity conference against racism and fascism.

A sharp message went out from the trade unionists, community activists and local councillors present that there can be no "no go" areas for anti-racists, and that the Unity conference must be restaged at the venue.

Plyvine Catering which leases part of the facility from the council, cancelled the event after telephone threats from racists.

This is the very hall where the Nazi BNP held a national meeting, booked under a false name, earlier in the year.

A 50-strong meeting after the rally pledged itself to re-launch the conference and build the campaign to stop the Nazi groups trying to organise in the area.

●**MARTIN LYNCH**

Greenwich & Woolwich

MEMBERS OF the Greenwich Socialist Alliance and students from the Globalise Resistance movement lobbied the Saturday morning surgery of Greenwich and Woolwich MP Nick Raynsford last weekend.

After handing out leaflets condemning the record of the Labour government and calling for a vote for the Socialist Alliance candidate Kirstie Paton, a local teacher, the protest moved inside to speak to the MP directly.

Kirstie Paton challenged Raynsford to condemn handing over the running of her school to a private company in a proposed PFI privatisation scheme.

Refugees

MIKE TAYLOR, branch treasurer of Bristol National Union of Journalists, faces a possible prison sentence for fighting the deportation of Amanj Gafor, a Kurdish-Iraqi asylum seeker.

Mike was arrested last August for leading a protest at Heathrow airport that temporarily stopped Amanj's deportation.

Mike will be in court on Friday 6 April at Uxbridge magistrates court charged with organising a protest on airport property as well as refusing to leave during a demonstration.

Tony Benn MP has issued a letter calling for support and solidarity with Mike Taylor when he appears in court.

■**Join the protest at 10am, Friday 6 April, Uxbridge Magistrates Court, Harefield Road, Uxbridge, Middlesex. Bring banners.**

TWO HUNDRED people crammed into a club night in Brighton last Saturday to raise money for the Sussex Refugee Association.

The night was organised by Brighton & Hove Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers.

●**BECKY SHTASEL**

Housing

UNIONS AND tenants organisations are working to make sure the future of council housing is at the centre of the general election.

They plan rallies around the country to launch the "Tenants Manifesto".

Meanwhile, in many areas local campaigns are putting election candidates on the spot over council housing by organising hustings.



●**SATURDAY 31 MARCH Justice for asbestos victims. Protest rally. 10.30am, Clydebank Town Hall.**

Speakers include STUC general secretary Bill Speirs. Phone 0141 951 1008.

●**WEDNESDAY 4 APRIL Sod off Sodexo. International day of action in defence of asylum seekers. For details of planned actions phone the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers on**

07958 478 628 or e-mail info@defend asylum.org

●**SATURDAY 7 APRIL Challenging Racism. A conference called by the Wales TUC. 11am-3pm, Cardiff City Hall. Pre-booking essential. Phone Wales TUC on 02920 372 345 or e-mail wtuc@tuc.org.uk**

●**SATURDAY 21 APRIL PCS Left Unity conference. Mechanics Institute, Manchester. Open to all PCS members.**

Speakers include Mark Serwotka, general secretary elect. For information phone Kevin Kelly on 0191 581 0257 or e-mail kevinandjulie@kellyk30.freemove.co.uk

Health workers

'Turn words into action'

DUDLEY STRIKERS TELL UNION LEADERS

SOME 60 striking health workers from Dudley Group of Hospitals lobbied the health sector conference of the UNISON public sector union, which began in Cardiff on Monday of this week.

The ancillary workers were on their 133rd day of strike action against the Private Finance Initiative (PFI).

The strikers held a 150-strong conference fringe meeting.

It was addressed by Angela Thompson, a striking catering worker who is standing as a Socialist Alliance candidate in the general election.

She echoed many strikers' sense of frustration that the UNISON leadership have only given token support to the dispute since it began last August.

"We have shown our strength and determination. But if we could have won alone we would have done it by now," said Angela.

"For the last four years I've been coming to the health conference arguing for a serious campaign against PFI. We are no nearer that today."

Angela urged UNISON members to "go back to your branches and put as much pressure on this union and this government as you can."

HELEN SHOOTER reports from Cardiff

"I'm standing as a Socialist Alliance candidate because I intend to expose New Labour for what they are. They gave us false promises in 1997."

Phil, another striker, added, "We're told UNISON can't afford a national campaign for us."

"But I see UNISON is going to give a seven-figure sum to the Labour Party, and they say they can't afford one national advert about our strike. It's a bloody shame."

Marilyn, a health conference delegate from Norwich, was one of those at the meeting who pledged continued support for the strike.

"Everybody needs to get behind this," she said.



DUDLEY STRIKERS have shown their determination. Now UNISON leaders need to throw their weight behind the fight

A missed opportunity

UNISON LEADERS stressed their continued support for the Dudley workers' fight on the first morning of the health conference.

But they wasted the chance to put their words against PFI into action.

They argued against a call for a national demonstration against health secretary Alan Milburn in his Darlington constituency.

Sasha Strike, a Newcastle delegate, argued for the demonstration:

"Our members don't want to work in a privatised NHS. We can effectively show this by a demonstration."

"I voted Labour hoping for a better future. What have we got? Privatisation."

"People feel cheated."

Workers feel New Labour are the Tories in sheep's clothing."

But UNISON head of health Bob Abberley argued that demonstrations were "old fashioned".

"If you can't turn out enough numbers from your branch, and I mean a bus full, then don't support the motion," he said.

The vote for a march was narrowly lost on a show of hands.

UNISON's leaders do not want an all-out confrontation with New Labour in the run-up to the election.

But the mood of the delegates was one of deep bitterness at the government's continued privatisation in the NHS.

Student nurses

WE ARE student nurses working and living in the University College London Hospitals (UCLH).

Our bursary is £460 a month, the equivalent of £2.60 an hour. Out of that we are expected to pay £260 per calendar month in rent for a small single room.

Some student nurses have dropped out because of debt. Many more of us feel that with mounting debt we will have no choice but to follow them.

We are sad and angry we may be forced to do this.

We were told by Gordon Brown in the budget that money is being pumped into the NHS to help recruit and retain nurses for the NHS. Our reality is that we may have to leave because of poverty pay and high rents.

We ask you to join us in a lobby of the UCLH trust board next Wednesday, 4 April, 5.30pm, outside the National Temperance Hospital, 112 Hampstead Road, London NW1.

● **STUDENT NURSES, UCLH**

NATFHE

THE STRIKE ballot over pay in further education colleges has been delayed.

A key committee of the lecturers' NATFHE union has deferred the start of the ballot until 25 April.

Many will be angered by the leadership, which claimed that "only" 223 branches had submitted correct details of their membership's details.

Despite the delay, activists plan to step up the fight to win the ballot.

A national activists' meeting, "Organising Resistance", has been called for 21 April in Manchester.

Royal London Hospital

MANAGEMENT AT east London's biggest hospital have launched a serious attack on workers' union organisation amid a fight over a PFI privatisation plan.

Bosses at the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel have suspended UNISON shop steward Frank de Guelle, a health support worker who has worked in the NHS for ten years.

Frank has been targeted over his alleged "aggressive" behaviour in two clashes with management. One involved him representing a black union member who had a grievance.

The other was over Frank distributing leaflets five weeks ago to build a union-backed meeting against the PFI privatisation scheme.

The meeting was a resounding success and launched a serious campaign against one of the country's biggest PFI schemes. This will mean hundreds of jobs axed and the hospital building privatised.

Workers are in no doubt that Frank has been singled out for his active opposition to privatisation.

Sponsors so far include the Wales and Yorkshire & Humberside regions of NATFHE, vice-president Tina Downes and other NEC members, several branches and many individual NATFHE members.

Speakers at the meeting will include Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary elect.

Many NATFHE members feel the time is right to launch a united socialist organisation in the union, and the Manchester meeting could be the springboard.

"Managers don't like the fact that Frank and the union have been campaigning against the PFI scheme," says UNISON branch secretary Phil Billows.

Union activists were out over the weekend leafletting wards and across the hospital to win support for Frank, and to build for a mass meeting.

"If anyone is being aggressive it is management in their attitude towards people who stand against their plans," says Phil Billows.

"We're having a mass union meeting and will propose that we take whatever action necessary to stand by Frank and defend the union."

■ **Rush messages of support to Phil Billows, UNISON branch secretary, Union Office, Royal London Hospital, Whitechapel Road, London E1 1BB. Fax 020 7377 7679.**

Teachers

TEACHERS WERE waiting to see if their union leaders were about to call a halt to industrial action, as *Socialist Worker* went to press.

There is a mounting sense of anger and betrayal in staff rooms.

A special executive meeting of the National Union of Teachers was set to consider

500 strikers hit the streets

PICKETS WERE out in force again this week at all five gates of the Willerby Holiday Homes caravan factory in Hull.

Some 250 pickets, members of the UCATT building union, are active and successfully turning most deliveries away.

On Friday all 500 strikers marched to a mass strike meeting in Hull down the busy Hedon Road, defying police attempts to control them. "The march gave the strike and us pickets a real boost," said one picket.

The caravan workers' stand has given workers at another Hull factory—Idel Standard—the confidence

to go for a strike ballot over new "flexible" contracts.

These will mean 20 per cent wage cuts for several hundred workers.

Willerby management are still refusing to talk to the union, and insist on dealing only with solicitors for UCATT. They have also stopped the check-off scheme of paying union subs.

But the strikers are determined. They know other caravan firms are watching this dispute carefully.

"Ours is a bigger strike than just at Willerby. It's for all the local lads building caravans," said a Hedon Road picket.

● **ROGER SMITH**

ONE-DAY CONFERENCE

ORGANISING THE RESISTANCE TO PRIVATISATION

CALL BY THE DUDLEY STRIKERS

This Saturday, 31 March, 12 noon-4pm
South Camden Community School,
Charrington Street, London NW1

SPEAKERS INCLUDE

Tony Benn MP ● Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary elect ● Bob Crow, RMT assistant general secretary ● Liz Davies, ex Labour Party NEC

Backed by the RMT national executive and the London regions of the RMT, ASLEF and FBU unions

whether to suspend "no cover action" on Wednesday of this week.

The NASUWT union executive voted last week to suspend the action. NASUWT members contacted by *Socialist Worker* said they were outraged at the decision.

And NUT activists were putting pressure on their lead-

ers to sustain the action.

The government and local authority employers have been left reeling by teachers refusing to cover for vacancies and absences of longer than three days.

Education secretary David Blunkett first tried to bully teachers into covering for a record number of vacancies.

Then he and the employers offered talks and said they would consider paying teachers overtime.

But the industrial action was called to highlight the shortage of teachers and cut increasing workloads.

Teachers in school after school report that staff reject talk of overtime payments.

They want decreased workload and more teachers, and intend to send that message to their union leaders this week.

Haverstock school

CAMDEN COUNCIL officers called a meeting of parents last week to debate the proposal to use the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) to rebuild Haverstock School.

Teachers at the school were told they could not attend and were left outside the meeting, leafletting the parents on their way in.

The director of education and several senior officers put on a glossy slide show to try to sell the idea to the parents and

governors in the meeting.

Nearly all the contributions from the floor were against PFI.

Parents talked about how they did not want their children's education connected to private companies.

The senior council officers clearly went away with the message to dump PFI, and the parents went away to build the lobby of the education committee on Wednesday 28 March.

● **MANDY BERGER**

Socialist Worker

PRESCOTT ATTEMPTS TO RAM THROUGH PRIVATISATION

Stop the tube sell off

PROTESTING AGAINST POOL CLOSURE



Picture: DUNCAN BROWN

HUNDREDS OF people joined a protest last week against the threatened closure of Govanhill swimming pool in Glasgow. Campaigners have occupied the pool to keep it open

TUBE WORKERS in London were preparing for a 24-hour strike on Thursday as *Socialist Worker* went to press.

They faced frantic efforts by deputy prime minister John Prescott to force through his privatisation scheme.

London Underground management spent a week hinting at legal threats against the rail unions and trying to bully tube workers into going to work on the strike day.

Yet tube workers' determination grew despite that and a disgraceful decision

by the leadership of one of their unions, ASLEF, to call off its official strike.

New Labour is increasingly isolated over its PPP privatisation plan for the tube.

Bob Kiley, the man London mayor Ken Livingstone has brought in to take over management of the tube in a few months time, is no friend of the trade unions.

But he slammed the privatisation scheme on Monday.

He said, "The government have a proposal. But it is a dumb proposal and we are trying to get it back into the land of the sane."

Talks between Kiley and Prescott broke down at the weekend as New Labour insisted that private consortia are given control of the tube under the PPP scheme.

Claws

These are made up of the companies that have got their claws on the mainline railway.

New Labour is caught in a vice. Blair has said he wants a deal done over the tube this week.

London Labour MPs

fear that an ongoing dispute on the tube could hit them hard in the general election.

Tube privatisation is deeply unpopular. As Louise Christian, who is solicitor for the victims of the Ladbroke Grove and Southall rail crashes and is standing for the Socialist Alliance in north London in the general election, says:

"I support the tube workers and so do the majority of people. It's clear privatisation is unsafe and we do not want the tube to go the same way as the disastrous system on the mainline railway."

But New Labour is committed to privatisation across the public sector.

That is why instead of abandoning the tube sell off, Prescott was looking to last ditch talks on Tuesday to get it through.

Rank and file tube workers held an unofficial meeting the night before.

The message from that meeting was clear. Serious action by the rail unions, and solidarity between tube workers no matter what union they are in, can defend safety and keep the tube in public hands.

What is going on at top of ASLEF?

"I'M OUTRAGED. This is no time to call off a strike, with the government and management on the defensive."

That is how one tube driver in the ASLEF union reacted to the news that his union leaders had called off an official strike for this Thursday.

The move left the RMT union planning an official strike alone, after an astonishing 11 to one vote for action.

Activists in both unions responded with calls for members of all unions on the tube to refuse to cross picket lines on the day of the planned strike.

Such solidarity ensured an effective strike on 5 February.

"Then it was ASLEF striking officially, and the RMT banned from taking part due to a court ruling," one RMT activist told a meeting of rank and file tube workers on Monday.

"Over 4,000 RMT members refused to cross picket lines. We need the same action by ASLEF members now."

ASLEF members began organising that action last week. Branches at East Finchley, Arnos Grove and Neasden voted not to cross picket lines.

Tony Dugard, an ASLEF union rep at Arnos Grove, said, "The majority of ASLEF reps are calling on members to respect picket lines."

"Every ASLEF member I've spoken to says the decision to call off our official action was a stitch up."

The ASLEF executive met on Wednesday morning last week and decided by four votes to three to continue with the strike.

Then the executive member responsible for the tube, Terry Wilkinson, was called to a meeting with London Underground management.

In his absence the meeting was reconvened. Under pressure from general secretary Mick Rix it then overturned the original decision.

Terry Wilkinson heard of the new decision from management.

Unresolved

The only change in London Underground's offer was to change the word "consultation" for "full discussion". All the outstanding issues of safety and job security were unresolved.

Yet the ASLEF leadership, or rather a key section of it, stitched up a deal.

Mick Rix was saying at the beginning of this week that he would not undermine the action and would be on the RMT's picket line alongside its assistant general secretary, Bob Crow.

ASLEF activists were using those statements to build solidarity.

But as one ASLEF member says, "What the hell is going on — calling off a strike and then saying you'll be on the picket line?"

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